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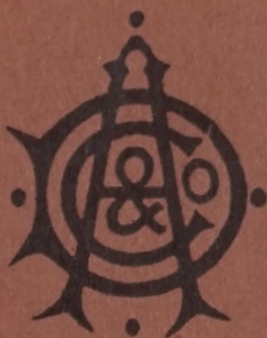
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A

THOROUGH BOHEMIENNE.

BY

MADAME CHARLES REYBAUD.



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APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-VOLUME SERIES. V. 2

A

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BY

MADAME CHARLES REYBAUD,

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDSMITH'S WIFE."



NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
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1879.

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A THOROUGH BOHEMIENNE.

I.

ON the northern coast of Brittany, facing a deeply indented bay, stands an old château, or, to use the language of the country, a manor-house, the greater part of which dates from the early part of the sixteenth century, when the Duchess Anne reigned over Brittany and over France. The great feudal wars then were terminated, and the nobility no longer intrenched their dwellings with those formidable defenses which imparted to seigniorial mansions so much of the aspect of a prison.

The château of Kerbséjean, built by one of the officials of the court of the queen-duchess, has neither donjon nor keep, drawbridge nor moat. The façade, flanked by two slender towers, is pierced by small windows, with lozenge-shaped panes; and at the end of the vaulted passage, which serves a vestibule, rises a spiral staircase ascending to the top of the house.

In front of the principal entrance is a broad terrace shaded by magnificent lindens. A solid wall upholds this terrace, while through an arch below passes the road which leads to Saint-Pol-de-Léon. The wall is surmounted by a stone parapet which gives a monumental air to the whole building.

At the time of the spring tides the sea rises as high as the terrace ; and at all times can be heard from under the lindens the swash and murmur of the waves as they break on the rocks with which the shores are covered.

Not far from the château of Kerbséjean lies a long line of half-tumble-down houses, following the shore of the bay. These represent the little village of R——, the port where smugglers and pirates formerly landed their booty. Once a numerous population enlivened this spot, but it disappeared or died out when maritime wars ceased ; and in our day few of these houses have either windows or doors. Piles of rubbish indicate the direction in which the streets formerly ran, while it is with difficulty that one can find a sign of the wharves whereon so many fine cargoes were deposited. It is now no more than a miserable fishing village.

One morning in the beginning of July, some few years since, a young girl—almost a child indeed—and a middle-aged woman, with the air of a governess, were seated near the parapet, in the

shadow of the lindens. The governess worked steadily and silently at her embroidery, while her pupil was drawing with quaint precision the outlines of the landscape and the bay.

The girl was very beautiful. She had the dazzling complexion, blue eyes, and abundant fair hair of the daughters of the soil. Living in this old manor, it was easy to divine that she was a Kerbséjean. The governess too was a Bretonne. She had the calm, gentle features and the honest countenance of the women of that land.

Suddenly the girl stopped to listen, with pencil uplifted.

"Hark ! Madame Gervais," she said, "do you not hear music ?"

"Some one has a tamborine under the terrace, my dear ; that is all," answered the governess.

Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean rose and leaned over the parapet.

"Oh ! dear Gervais," she said in a tone of suppressed amazement, "come and look quickly !"

Two persons, a man of forty and a very young girl, were resting against the wall, by the side of a little babbling brook that bravely crossed the road at this point. Their costume was most conspicuous and eccentric. The man wore a silk coat covered with spangles and faded embroidery ; a tow wig did duty instead of hat, and some artificial flowers were jauntily stuck in his button-hole. His breeches were short and of somewhat equivo-

cal whiteness, while the soles of his low shoes were split and worn. He was wiping his face with a blue checked handkerchief, so old that it was full of holes. He was evidently one of those mountebanks, one of those perambulating musicians, to whom the public frequenting the inns at the cross-roads have agreed to give that most preposterous title of "the Marquis of Artichokes."

The girl was attired in much the same style. Her white cotton dress was very short, and trimmed around just above the knees with a soiled ribbon which had been originally of a pale blue. A much-worn velvet waist and high-laced boots completed her costume. We must not omit to mention her ornaments, which consisted of a sort of diadem trimmed with gold lace ; it served to keep her brown curls in comparative order. Brass rings hung from her ears, and a huge chain of the same metal was passed twice around her throat ; while pewter and brass rings were on every finger of her small brown hands. This strange-looking creature shook her tamborine and hummed a Tyrolean air as she sat and watched the coming in of the tide.

Meanwhile the man in the wig had taken a piece of bread from his pocket, a handful of cherries, and a tiny gourd.

"Well ! Mimi," he said, breaking the bread in two equal portions, "do you not think it quite time for breakfast ?"

"Eat, father," she answered without turning her head. "Eat ; I am not in the least hungry."

"Our feast to-day does not amount to much, my poor child," said the man with a sigh ; "but yesterday was really a very bad day ! only thirty-five centimes did we make. But we shall do better at Morlaix, which is a commercial town. I think, too, I will try my luck in the village over there. We will spread that carpet down before the coast-guard station. You will dance, and I will execute some of my feats of legerdemain ; and it will be hard luck if a silver piece or two does not fall into your saucer. Come, Mimi, eat a bit and cheer up. We will dine well to-night."

"Can we have soup ?" asked Mimi earnestly.

"Certainly, little girl ; but in the mean time you had best not scorn your breakfast," murmured the father with a sigh.

"I do not scorn it," answered Mimi ; "bread and cherries are two very good things, I am sure !"

"It is because the piece of bread is so small then," said the mountebank, with tears in his eyes ; "you think it is no more than I want myself."

Mimi shrugged her shoulders.

"Never mind, papa !" she exclaimed as she shook the bells of her tamborine. "Eat your breakfast ; you must be very hungry !"

Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean had heard all this

conversation unseen by the speakers. She now turned toward Madame Gervais with tears in her eyes.

"Poor things !" she exclaimed. "Poor things ! They must have a good breakfast sent out to them at once !"

"Very well, my dear," answered the governess ; "I will go and give the necessary orders."

"No," answered the girl impulsively, eager to relieve this uncomplaining poverty—a poverty which bore so proudly, too, all this strange frippery instead of common-place rags—"No, I will go myself."

A few minutes more, and a servant was seen going down the road with a basket on his arm and a bottle in his hand.

The mountebank placed the cherries before Mimi and began to eat his dry bread with a hearty relish.

"There is far more than I want, as you will see, my dear ; and I do not choose that my daughter shall deny herself to pamper her old father. There are two swallows of brandy left in the gourd ; we will divide those, my dear ! It is not as good as a glass of good wine, but it is at all events better than pure water ! Just think, Mimi, what a delicious breakfast we could have on this grass, with a little cold meat and a bottle of wine between us !"

At that moment the servant appeared as by

magic, and, placing before them the basket and bottle of wine, said, as he took off his laced cap :

“Here are a few provisions. I trust you will enjoy them. I will come back after a while for the basket and napkin.”

And he disappeared as rapidly as he had come.

Mimi and her father looked at each other in utter stupefaction.

“Let us see !” cried Mimi, lifting the white napkin which covered the basket.

“Cold veal, cheese, and fresh bread !” said her father, rubbing his hands in ecstasy.

“Yes, that is good, very good !” murmured Mimi gravely ; and, taking a small knife from her pocket, she proceeded to cut the meat into slices. This done, both father and daughter began to eat eagerly, like people absorbed in the satisfaction of an imperious need. When their first hunger was in some degree appeased, the mountebank recovered his speech—

“Do you know,” he said, “that I feel as if it were a fairy tale ?”

“Yes, isn’t it strange ?” answered Mimi.

“Who could have sent this basket ?” resumed her father. “It may have been the master of the château—the old gentleman who saw us through the gate, and who returned our bow with so much politeness. Who knows,” he added with ingenuous vanity, “that he did not see us yesterday at

Saint-Pol-de-Léon on the square ? He liked your dancing."

"Very likely !" murmured Mimi indifferently. "But look here, papa ; there is another glass in the bottle ; take it."

"No, indeed," he replied ; "this good wine is going to my head." Then crossing his hands over his stomach, he added with a blissful look : "My dear, I have breakfasted like a king ! And the dessert, Mimi—have you forgotten the dessert ? We have some cherries, you know ; now eat them."

Mimi took some, but murmured presently in a regretful tone, "What a pity ! I cannot eat another mouthful."

"What a pity !" repeated the mountebank. "There is still a good bit of meat and some bread left. Suppose I put them in paper for us to-night ?"

"Pshaw ! we should have to carry them."

"But I don't think it would be polite to put the leavings back in the basket," remonstrated her father.

Mimi without a word tossed the débris of their meal some little distance away among the grass, covered the basket with the napkin, and then leaned back against the wall with folded arms.

"I am sleepy," she murmured with half-closed eyes.

"And so am I," replied the mountebank,

stretching himself out at full length upon the turf.

“*Au revoir, papa,*” said the girl with a laugh.

A few moments later, when the servant came for the basket, he found the two soundly sleeping ; and a poor woman passing by had gathered up the remains of their repast from the grass.

II.

THE same day, in the afternoon, the Kerbséjean family were all assembled in a large salon which had much the appearance of a museum. Thanks to the isolated position, the manor had not been visited by the soldiery of the French Republic, and no revolutionary hand had ever been laid upon the heraldic emblems or the pictures of saints, lords, and ladies which hung upon the walls. Although the furniture of this salon had been in some degree renewed, and deliciously comfortable sofas and chairs stood all about, and a piano and jardinière of extremely modern style were also there, the general air of the apartment and its decorations belonged to the time of Queen Anne. The Kerbséjean coat of arms was sculptured in high relief over the enormous chimney, where tall dogs of iron elaborately wrought supported noble logs of oak. The cipher of the Queen-Duchess and the arms of Brittany shone

above the windows, and again in the center of the ceiling.

The Kerbséjean family was by no means numerous. In the salon were only three persons: the pretty Irène, her father, the Count Jean de Kerbséjean, and the Count's uncle, another Kerbséjean, formerly a Knight of Malta, but who since the suppression of the order resided at the manor. Those members of this family circle who had been prematurely removed by death seemed not to have altogether quitted their old home, for traces of them were to be seen in every direction. It was as if Irène's mother and her dead brothers were expected momentarily to resume their places in the salon. The young mother's embroidery frame was still in the corner by the window, in front of the chair where it had been her habit to sit. Her favorite books were on the étagère within reach of her hand, and her light straw hat which she was in the habit of wearing when she went into the garden hung on the curtain hook. A pile of children's toys lay heaped in the same corner, as if they had been used an hour before. Opposite the chimney there was a large picture of Madame de Kerbséjean and her sons; and these charming youthful faces seemed to smile from the canvas.

This home circle presented strange contrasts. Count de Kerbséjean was a man of forty, and looked older. His complexion had lost its fresh-

ness, and he was acquiring an *embonpoint* which threatened to terminate in absolute obesity. He was beginning to be negligent in his dress, to wear a loose coat and pantaloons. This costume added to his years, and whoever saw him now for the first time would have had much difficulty in crediting that he had once been called "the handsome Kerbséjean."

The old Chevalier of Malta was, on the contrary, erect and alert. His costume, which was almost that of a naval officer, suited his proud face and carriage. His figure was almost as slender and his bearing quite as haughty as when he sailed in the Levant upon one of the Maltese galleys.

The uncle and his nephew were finishing a game of chess, and the youthful Irène, with both elbows on the table, was trying to follow the shrewd combinations of the two adversaries. After a quarter of an hour of profound silence, the Count swept the men off the board with a resigned air.

"You had a chance still," said the Chevalier with a smile. "Will you have your revenge?"

"Not just now, uncle," replied the Count; "I am going outside with a cigar until dinner is ready."

With these words he took his hat and stick and lounged out of the room. Irène slipped into her father's chair at the chess table, deftly ar-

ranged the men, and sat with an expectant look on her pretty face, waiting for her uncle to ask her to play with him. But the Chevalier sat leaning his head on his hand, pensive or moody, it was hard to tell which. After a long silence the child said, in a low voice and in a caressing tone :

“Uncle Pierre, you are sad.”

“I am anxious,” he replied with a sigh.

“Is it that business about the will?” she asked sympathetically.

“Yes, dear,” said her uncle.

But his words were not altogether true. The death of a relative in the colonies, and the will made by this relative bequeathing his property to him, certainly crowded upon him many business cares ; but with these he was far less occupied and harassed than by a matter which was going on under his eyes. He realized with inexpressible pain that Irène’s father was falling into a sort of moral deterioration or decay, the progress of which was becoming daily more rapid.

The Count de Kerbséjean was of limited intellectual development, with neither elevated tastes nor aims—altogether weak and facile in character. But a careful education and the watchful influence of his family had modified the development of low tastes, and Count Jean, as he had been called before his father’s death, passed for rather an elegant and distinguished personage, with sufficient sense and education for ordinary every-day life.

At a very early age he married a clever and charming woman, whom he loved with his whole heart, and she soon acquired over him a moral ascendancy. The change in him, his decadence, dated from the day of her death. After the first transports of uncontrolled despair, the Count lapsed into stolid resignation, which induced those around him to think that he was soon consoled. His habits of life changed entirely. He shut himself up from the world, and, instead of spending his winters at Brest or Paris, he remained the entire year at Kerbséjean. He spent most of his time within doors, at first occupying himself with the education of his daughter, and finding sufficient gentle excitement in conversing with the Chevalier. By degrees, however, he acquired the habit of mixing with his inferiors, where unfortunately he soon felt himself thoroughly at home.

This man, who had lived in the best circles in France, spent his mornings lounging on the beach, seeking some companion with whom he could exchange his views upon the weather while he smoked his pipe. He wandered along the shore until he reached the village and an establishment honored by the mythological name of the *Café de Neptune*, but which was in reality a miserable *cabaret*, where far more brandy was consumed than Mocha. There he was certain of finding a half dozen loungers who did him the honor of smok-

ing and drinking with him ; and in their society he passed the greater part of the day. In the afternoon he went to the beach again, and lingered at the little coast-guard station ; and in the evening he regularly returned to the Café de Neptune. It was even rumored that more than once he had been seen at midnight coming home with a very uncertain step, and had found considerably difficulty in climbing the steps of the manor-house.

The Chevalier had noticed this change in his nephew's mode of life from the very beginning, and had done his best to prevent it, and to check the formation of these evil habits. He soon, however, realized the futility of his efforts, and contented himself with quietly looking on with an aching heart.

Irène, up to the time of which we write, had noticed nothing. At times it seemed to her that her father had grown much older, and that she remembered him handsomer and more elegant in manners and appearance. Her tenderness and respect for him were very great ; but she had no especial desire to be with him, and preferred the society of her dear uncle Pierre, of whom she rarely spoke without employing some term of endearment in addition to his name.

He, in his turn, had concentrated upon her all the affections of the loving nature of an old bachelor who had naught else to care for. She was the joy and the happiness of his old age, the

comfort of his declining years, the consolation in many hours of secret anxiety and bitter disappointment occasioned him by his nephew.

On this especial day the Chevalier and his grandniece were alone in the salon just before dinner, as was their habit. Irène advanced a pawn with a coaxing look, and the game began. While Irène laughed gayly at having driven her uncle into a corner, where he was defending his queen, the Count reëntered hastily, with a disturbed countenance, a reddened nose, and a brow bathed in perspiration.

He leaned on the back of his uncle's chair, breathing very hard, like a man who has been running.

"Ah, Jean, you have come back again then?" said the Chevalier, not turning round.

"Yes, uncle," he answered. "I have been the spectator of a scene which has made a terrible impression upon me."

"An accident?" asked the Chevalier, with a bishop suspended between thumb and finger.

"A most extraordinary one! And by some strange fatality I reached the spot just in time to witness it. When I left you half an hour ago, I went at once to the village. A little crowd had gathered before a café to listen to a traveling musician who was playing on the guitar and singing some gay songs."

"A poor devil in masquerading costume," in-

interrupted the Chevalier. "I saw him this morning. He passed the gate with a gypsy girl."

"The very same—a poor thing about the age of Irène. She danced while her father played. I gave them some money—more, I fancy, than they are in the habit of receiving, for the man overwhelmed me with thanks. As the crowning touch to their performance, he spread an old carpet down and turned a few double somersaults, and stood on his head, and all that sort of thing. He finally sprang on the back of a chair and stood for a minute with one foot in his hand, uttering some poor joke. Unfortunately one of the legs of the chair cracked; the man lost his balance, and fell with his arms extended, striking his head on the ground. His tow wig fell off. No one was startled at first, for we all supposed that the fall was perfectly natural; but as he did not move some one went to assist him, and then it was seen that he was dead!"

"Dead! And his poor child?" cried Irène.

"She had gone into the café, and had not even seen her father fall; but she came out just as the men were lifting him, and she heard them say that he was dead. The scream she uttered still rings in my ears. Never did I see such despair and grief!"

"Poor child! She loved her father," said Irène, with her eyes full of tears.

"How do you know that?" asked the Chevalier in astonishment.

"I saw them this morning," his niece answered. "They were lying by the side of the road, and, as I was on the terrace, I could hear them talk. The father urged the girl to eat, and she refused because there was not enough bread for both."

"Oh, my child ! you heard that—you saw hungry people at our very door, and said nothing !" interrupted the Chevalier reproachfully.

"Do not be troubled, dear uncle," answered the girl with an expression that went right to the heart of the good man. "They did not go away hungry," she added slowly.

Her uncle drew her fair face down to his, and kissed her brow with tears in his eyes, saying in a low voice, "Forgive me, sweet."

"The body of this unfortunate man was carried into Cattel Piolot's house," continued the Count ; "I gave them money that they might do all that was necessary, and bade them take care of the child."

"We will see what we can do for her," said the Chevalier.

"I know," said Irène, before whose eyes flitted a vision of the clanking gilt chains and diadem above a weeping face. "First, we must give her a black dress."

"You are right, my child," answered her Uncle Pierre. "Go find Madame Gervais, and beg her to occupy herself at once with that."

“They will only have to look in the wardrobe,” said Irène with a sigh; “it is such a little while since I left off mourning that my dresses will fit the poor thing.”

III.

THE next day the body of the mountebank was borne to the cemetery, and the charitable person who had paid the funeral expenses placed a black cross at the head of the grave.

This man, like all such who adopt a traveling profession, had all his papers perfectly correct. In a small tin case concealed among his clothing were his certificate of birth and that of his daughter, and other documents, all going to prove that he had been married and that the mother of the child now left alone in the world had been some time dead. After the funeral the Chevalier and his grandniece went to the house that sheltered poor Mimi. A toothless old woman sat spinning in front of the door.

“Good morning, Cattel Piolot,” said the Chevalier as he came near.

“May God for ever bless you, sir, and the young lady,” she answered in her Bréton *patois*. “I expected to see you to-day.”

“We came to see what we could do to console the poor little girl, and we brought her also a

black dress," said Irène, showing a package that she had taken the trouble to bring herself.

"That is very charitable," murmured the old woman. "You are like one of God's holy angels." Then, turning to the Chevalier, she added crossly: "I have been driven crazy by that gypsy girl. When I speak she neither hears nor understands. All day long she has done nothing but scream. Listen and you will hear her."

And at that moment a long melancholy wail rang through the small house.

"Ah! uncle, we came none too soon," murmured Irène, her heart filled with profound pity, as she drew the Chevalier into the corridor of Cattel Piolot's house. This dark passage opened into a little court-yard whose high walls were covered with ivy and moss.

"She is in here," said Cattel Piolot, stopping in front of a door on the left and drawing out a wooden peg that held the latch down. "When they came to remove the body she was so violent that we were obliged to hold her, and then to fasten her in here, to prevent her from rushing to the cemetery."

Mimi was crouched in the corner with her face against the wall, and arms limply hanging at her sides. The habit that she had necessarily acquired of fastening all her fineries very tightly to prevent them falling during her violent exercise had now kept everything steady in its place, and

nothing in her fanciful costume was disarranged. Her necklace with its triple chains was still displayed over her shabby velvet waist, and on her head she wore the diadem with its jingling pendants. It was evidently to this room that the body of the poor mountebank had been brought, and here that preparations had been made for the funeral. A portion of the poor man's clothing lay in a corner ; his bunch of faded artificial flowers and his guitar were on a table ; while his spangled coat hung on a nail behind the door.

At this moment, the poor child was silent from exhaustion, and but for an occasional sob that shook her shoulders one might have thought her dead. At this sorrowful sight Irène burst into tears and hid her face on her uncle's shoulder. The Chevalier, deeply touched, leaned over the girl, and said in a compassionate voice :

"My child, try and submit to the will of God. Have courage ; you are not entirely friendless and abandoned. Charitable persons have come to your assistance, and will do all in their power for you."

Mimi took no notice of these kind words, but uttered a heavy sigh and turned her head away, as if annoyed by these marks of interest.

Irène bent over her and said, as she laid the bundle of clothing by her side :

"There, poor little soul, is a black dress for you. Would you not like to put it on at once ?"

Mimi repulsed her with a wild gesture ; then, in a new transport of grief, she uttered cry after cry of agonized despair, interspersed with incoherent words.

"This is the way she has gone on," said Cattel Piolot, shrugging her shoulders. "Instead of shedding tears like a Christian, and praying on her knees for the soul of her dead father, she has conducted herself in this heathen fashion. You have spoken too gently to her, sir, by far ; be a little rough with her, and perhaps she may come to her senses. If she understood a word I said, I would try."

"Not while I am here," interrupted Irène, indignantly.

"She is in no state to understand us," said the Chevalier, looking at the unfortunate creature, who, in spite of her frantic gestures and heavy sighs, looked only half alive.

"She is not so much out of her senses as you fancy," murmured the old woman. "It is because she does not choose to speak, not because she does not understand, that she does not answer."

"Poor soul !" said Irène, sadly ; "would that it were in my power to comfort her. How gladly would I do anything for her !"

Again she stooped over Mimi and tried to take her hand ; but the girl, turning suddenly around, pushed her violently away, crying out at the same time :

"Leave me ! Do not touch me. You know nothing of my sufferings. Do not speak to me again ! Go away ! You have not lost your father. I hate you !"

These words were uttered in a hoarse voice, and with wild, affrighted eyes.

"Ah ! Good Heavens !" exclaimed Irène, starting back ; "the shock has driven her crazy !"

Cattel Piolot shook her head and replied hastily : "No, no, she is not crazy ; she is very wicked."

The Chevalier and his niece had left the room, and did not hear these words ; and, when the old woman joined them in the corridor, Irène said to her :

"You will take the best of care of this poor creature, will you not, my good Cattel ? You will try to coax her from that dark room into the sunshine, and you will not leave her alone. If you would kindly stay near, perhaps she would be less miserable."

"I have done my best," muttered the old woman ; "but she is just like a caged wild animal, and howls if one goes near her."

"She will be calmer soon," said the Chevalier, "and then we will come and see her again. In the mean time I leave her in your care, Cattel Piolot."

"Monsieur the Count said the same words to me an hour ago," answered the old woman, grave-

ly, "and of course it is my duty to fulfill your wishes ; but at the same time I must acknowledge to you that I am very anxious to see the last of this girl."

"And why, Cattel? Pray tell me why?" asked the Chevalier. "Have you no compassion for the unhappy?"

"Yes, sir, plenty," answered the old woman—"plenty, if they are Christians and Bretons like myself. But this is a very different affair. No one knows who this girl is, nor where she comes from! And then just look at her dress—it is a carnival costume! To tell the truth, sir, I laid out the father and watched over the dead body, because that is my business; but, now that the poor man is laid in holy ground with the prayers of the Church, I do not care to keep his daughter any longer under my roof."

"Whom else can I ask to do this good work, then?" asked the Chevalier, not caring to urge the woman. "I presume the child can stay with you, Cattel Piolot, until night?"

"Until sunset only," she answered; "and if you send no one for her then, sir, where shall I take her?"

"To the manor," he answered, coldly; "and here are two crowns for you."

"Thanks, sir," replied the woman, with a gesture of refusal. "It was out of charity, and not with the hope of reward, that I kept the child

here. Give the money to her. Although I have a hard struggle to gain my bread, I yet am glad to do a kind act sometimes to those worse off than myself, out of love to the dear Lord ! ”

“ And the dear Lord will not forget you, Cattel Piolot. I know very well that you are a good, kind woman after all,” said the Chevalier, drawing the hand of his niece through his arm.

As the two passed down the little garden path they looked back, and saw the old Brétonne spinning quietly at her door.

In the twilight Madame Gervais herself went for Mimi. Irène’s governess had one of those calm, decided characters that can always control a passionate, undisciplined nature like Mimi’s. When she entered the room where the girl was, she went directly to her, and said gently :

“ My child, you are to put on this dress at once. Come here, that I may assist you.”

Mimi turned her head, looked the governess full in the face for a minute, and obeyed. Without the smallest delay Madame Gervais divested her of her tawdry attire and put on a black woolen dress, cut close in the throat, and with long sleeves. A plain cap took the place of the diadem, which with the necklace and bracelets was flung into a corner.

“ And now we are ready—let us go,” said Madame Gervais, drawing poor Mimi from the room, the girl making no resistance.

"You see she is perfectly docile," said Madame Gervais as she passed Cattel Piolot, who was awaiting them on the threshold.

"She is quiet enough just now," the woman answered, examining the sad and unresigned countenance of the girl; "but all is not over yet. Her grief is choking her, for since her misfortune she has not shed a tear."

Poor Mimi's eyes were indeed dry; her contracted lids were surrounded by a livid circle, and her eyes seemed sadly sunk. As soon as she was out of the house she began to walk with the greatest rapidity, without speaking, without looking where she was going, and seemed supported by a mechanical force.

The sun was going down. The air was soft and sweet; while the waves lapped the shores dreamily. Cattel Piolot's house was the farthest of all the houses from the château of the whole line of dilapidated houses; beyond it the trees and bushes grew in wild confusion.

Suddenly Mimi stopped and looked about with parted lips, as if drinking in the fresh breeze which came from the water.

"Rest a little, my child," said the good Madame Gervais, who had had considerable difficulty in following her. "You are very tired, are you not?"

"No," answered the girl abruptly. And yet in a moment she took a seat on a stone and re-

mained there in profound silence, with eyes vaguely wandering from sea to sky, now wrapped in the gray mist of twilight. The ineffable peace of this picture had its effect on the desolate creature ; her heart softened, and tears filled her dry and aching eyes.

Madame Gervais was seated at her side and made a slight gesture of sympathy, but did not speak. Then Mimi turned toward her, and said in a low voice broken by sobs :

“It is all over ; I have no longer any father. He is dead, the dear father who loved me so much ! How can I live without him ? He never left me an hour in all my life ; it is he who has always taken care of me.”

“And your mother ?” asked Madame Gervais.

“My mother died long ago ; I do not remember her in the least. When I was too young to walk my father carried me in his arms ; and when we were tired, we rested then, and always since, on the road-side. If it was cold he covered me with his own clothing. Ah, I have been very happy, but it never entered my head that my father could die. Yesterday—only yesterday—he was there, we passed those trees hand in hand ; and now he is gone, and I shall never see him again !”

At these words she covered her face with her hands and wept. Madame Gervais wisely allowed these tears to fall unchecked, and then took the girl by the hand and led her to the manor.

IV.

THAT same night Cattel Piolot was alone in a large high room, which was kitchen, parlor, and bedchamber all in one. This apartment was on the lower floor, and the windows looked out on the beach. It was unequally divided by a light partition which did not go up to the ceiling. The mantelpiece was about the height of a man, and a stone bench stood on each side of the chimney, in which, in spite of the season, burned a tiny fire of green wood. The furniture, apparently very ancient, was so blackened and dilapidated that the most intrepid and eager collector of curiosities would have hesitated to accept as a gift the stoves with quaintly carved legs, the armoire with wrought-iron hinges and lock, and the worm-eaten table which showed the remains of exquisite marquetry. One of those beds which in Brittany are called *lits clos* was built in a recess. A *lit clos* is in dimensions a coffin, in appearance a tomb; solid oak boards form its sides, and a calico curtain hangs over the opening through which the unfortunate occupant must slide to this place of rest, which neither air nor light can reach.

The old woman, seated in front of her chimney, stirred the coals with the end of a stick, and drew some potatoes from among the ashes, counting them aloud as she did so. In one corner of

the fireplace a thin, forlorn-looking cat watched this operation as if it portended some good to her, and uttered an occasional pitiful mew as she licked her paws.

"Be off with you, you lazy glutton," said Cattel Piolot, brandishing her stick. "Go somewhere else and work for your living like the rest of us. There are plenty of mice in the neighborhood!"

The poor animal jumped on the window sill. The lead-paned lattice was slightly ajar; the creature elongated itself like a weasel and disappeared through this narrow opening.

"Now, just look at that?" muttered the old woman; "that wretched beast will break the window from its hinges yet."

"And then robbers will come in there as well as through the door!" said a laughing voice outside.

Cattel Piolot started, but answered sharply:

"Robbers! what would robbers want in this poor house? Go your way, good people, and take care of your own affairs."

"Do not be disturbed," answered the same voice; "there are no people here—I am alone. Have you finished your supper, Cattel Piolot?"

"Not yet, Count Jean," she replied, suddenly recognizing the person who had spoken. "How long is it since sunset?"

"About an hour, but the night is very dark."

"Perhaps it is going to rain. Will you come in, Count Jean?"

"Willingly, for a moment at least," he answered, "particularly if you have a fire. Misfortunes never come singly. This morning I broke my favorite pipe, and this evening I have lost my box of matches."

The old woman hurried to the door, and, as she slipped the bolt and permitted her guest to enter her den, she said familiarly :

"It is long since you went home so early in the evening. Was there no one at the café?"

"Not a living soul!" he answered, lighting his pipe and taking a seat. "But at this season of the year it is by no means uncommon to find the place deserted. They have all gone poaching until sunrise."

"But the custom-house officials?"

"They are not there either. They are on the scent of some English merchandise; at least that is what I heard."

The old woman glanced through the dingy window, and answered with a silent laugh :

"The night seems made for smugglers. No moon and not a star in the sky!"

"Intensely hot day—stormy night," said the Count sententiously. "The weather has entirely changed, and I shall not be surprised if we have a tremendous tempest and high tides. What do you think about it, Cattel Piolot?"

"I say that it is raining already," she answered, drawing her head hastily in from the window. "Holy Father! the sky is riddled with lightning!"

"I came here, then, just in time," murmured the Count. "It is much more comfortable here by this little fire of crackling brushwood than out on the shore. But I am keeping you from your supper, Cattel Piolot?"

"My supper is soon finished," she answered, wiping her potatoes and laying them in a wooden bowl which she presented to the Count. He thanked her with a courteous gesture of refusal. Then she said with a knowing wink:

"I have something to offer you more to your taste, I fancy. Although I am a poor woman, you must not hurt my feelings by going out of my house without partaking of some refreshment. Am I not right, Count Jean?"

"I should certainly be sorry to wound you," he replied with a smile.

"Excuse me if I leave you a few moments in the dark," returned Cattel Piolot, taking the bit of candle which smoked and sputtered on the corner of the table. "I am going to the cellar."

She apparently experienced some difficulty regarding what she wanted, for she was gone at least fifteen minutes.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the Count as he saw

her appear with one of those oddly shaped flat bottles which were formerly brought from the French colonies; and contained the liqueur known as *crème de Barbades*. In the other hand she carried a pale-green flask, which he knew, as soon as he saw it, must hold the best French cognac.

"This is Jamaica rum, and the other is brandy," she said, as she placed a glass and the two bottles before the Count. "Such rum and such brandy are not seen in these days. The rum was on board of an English ship that was seized just off here the year of the false peace—"

"False peace!" interrupted the Count. "Do you mean the peace of Amiens?"

"Precisely! As to the cognac, it was among the merchandise that was taken the year that the new taxes were levied. There was a fearful fight. The custom-house officers thought they got all the booty, but they were mistaken. My poor Piilot got possession of a case of twenty-five bottles. The dear man thought he should drink them in peace and comfort; but, poor fellow, he never even tasted a drop!"

"And why, pray?" asked the Count.

"Because he was killed the very next day." answered Cattel Piilot with a long sigh.

"To be sure; I knew that, and ought to have remembered it. But, my poor Cattel," continued Count Jean, "he was not killed in the engagement with the English, if I remember aright."

“No, unfortunately not ; and that is why I could never be comforted. He was killed by the custom-house people. The vile dogs ! I loathe them even more than I do the English. Yes, that green uniform is the greatest enemy we poor people have. But they will go eventually to everlasting perdition ; that is a thought which is full of consolation to me. If I thought I should meet one of them in Paradise, I would not care to go there !”

After this explosion of the fury and resentment that still lurked in her bosom, Cattel Piolet drew the cork and filled the Count's glass.

“Thanks,” he said ; “but I never drink alone. Bring a glass for yourself, Cattel Piolet.”

“Here it is,” she answered, producing a cracked china cup.

The Count filled it, and they tossed off the contents of cup and glass in profound silence.

“Is it not like velvet as it passes over the tongue ?” asked Cattel, with evident enjoyment of the precious liquid.

The Count nodded, with an expression which said volumes, and was worth more than the most pompous eulogium.

“We will try it again,” said Cattel, pressing in the cork tightly ; “but now I want you to tell me what you think of that old cognac.”

The Count extended his glass, held it up between the light and his eyes that he might judge

of its color, and then drank drop by drop this Languedocan nectar.

"Well," said Cattel Piolot, "what have you to say about it?"

"I say," answered the Count, in a tone of profound conviction, "that good old brandy is the best liquor in the world."

His glass was already empty. Cattel filled it anew, while he put fresh tobacco in his pipe; then they again compared the Jamaica rum and the old cognac with so much perseverance and energy that both bottles were very sensibly diminished.

"My dear Cattel," said the Count, suddenly becoming very expansive, "I had no idea that I should finish the evening so agreeably."

"Yes, indeed," said the old woman with a chuckle, "we are snug enough. Nothing can disturb us. The rain patters on the window and the fire burns merrily. Let us make ourselves comfortable. There is something left in the bottles yet."

"My poor Cattel, you are a good woman, an excellent woman! I want to do something for you. You need some repairs on your house."

"No, indeed!" she answered hastily—"no, indeed; it would disturb me very much to have workmen here, and masons make a terrible dust."

"Then what do you want?" urged the Count, whose gratitude was strongly moved.

"Nothing in the world," answered the old woman. "I absolutely want nothing."

She too began to yield to the same influence which had exhilarated the Count, and became in her turn extremely communicative ; and as she passed her hand over her patched skirts she added :

"I look like a beggar, but if I pleased I could buy plenty of new clothes ; I could have china and glass, and even silver. But I do not choose to let everybody know what I have in a certain corner of this little hut. No one knows now anything about it."

"What on earth are you talking about ?" exclaimed the Count with a hearty laugh. "Have you money ? You had best not say so, my dear Cattel, for fear of robbers."

"I only tell you of it, sir," she answered, dropping her voice. "I have heaps of crowns and louis d'or."

"So much the better," he answered, "for I do not like to see you make your supper off potatoes and salt ; but now I feel at ease about you. But why do you stint yourself like this ? Is it for your son Celestin ?"

"Heaven help him !" she answered, the mere name seeming to anger her. "That good-for-nothing has never given me the smallest satisfaction. I brought him up to be a smuggler like his grandfather, like his father, like all the Piolots in

fact ; and you know how he has turned out. He learned to read and write, he learned the trade of a locksmith, and went six years wandering through France. A nice thing to do, now wasn't it ? and a pleasant little walk to take ! Of course he had met crowds of bad people, and these companions will have completed the work, and caused him to lose all fear of God and to forget the respect he owes me. When I think of this vagabond and of all these things, I can't sleep by night nor sit still in my chair by day."

"Then don't let us talk about him," replied the Count philosophically, as, placing both elbows on the table, he began to hum a tune, interrupting himself only to reply in monosyllables to the somewhat free speech of Cattel, who filled and re-filled the wine glass and the cup.

At last, when the bottles were both nearly empty, the Count said as he tried to rise :

"I should really like to know what sort of a night it is outside."

The old woman, who was considerably excited by what she had drunk, was yet steady on her feet, and went to the window. Looking out, she exclaimed :

"It is all fair again. I see the stars ; so much the worse ! So much the worse !"

"If I were at the café, I should know what time it is," said the Count, entirely forgetting that he had his watch. Cattel reminded him of

this fact by herself drawing it from his pocket and holding it before his eyes.

"Ah ! ah !" he said, "eleven o'clock already ! It is quite time I should be at home."

The old woman saw that he retained his balance with great difficulty as he turned around to look for his hat.

"Listen," she said ; "the rain has made the turf very slippery, and I am going a little way with you."

"No, no," answered the Count, speaking thickly. "I shall find the Brigadier, and we will walk along together. Good night, Cattel. Next time it will be my treat. Keep your bottles well locked. I shall be back to-morrow."

He staggered out of the house, and the fresh air roused him ; but his head was still affected and his brain much excited. A mad desire to talk and sing took possession of him, and he shouted disconnected sentences of long-forgotten drinking songs as he followed the shores of the little bay.

All was quiet at the manor. Every one had retired except the Chevalier, who was reading in the salon, and a servant who had fallen asleep in the hall while awaiting his master. Suddenly the Chevalier laid down his book and listened to the voice that came in gusts of uproarious merriment from the shore below. He speedily recognized it for the Count's, and soon understood what had happened. He shuddered with the fear that the

noise would awaken the household. Immediately deciding on the course to pursue, he passed softly through the hall without disturbing the slumbers of the servant, and went out to open the gate himself.

Monsieur de Kerbséjean was leaning against the wall, still singing loudly.

"Be quiet, Jean," said his uncle with restrained indignation—"be quiet, and come in and go to bed."

The Count laughed in a foolish sort of fashion, drew back a little, and began a new chorus. The Chevalier repeated what he had said, upon which the drunken man turned angrily and exclaimed with a threatening gesture :

"Will you let me be, you old driveling fool !"

"Come in, Kerbséjean !" said the Chevalier, with a look and a tone that had its effect even upon the bewildered mortal before him, who meekly obeyed, and, entering the house a little in front of his uncle, went to his room without uttering another syllable.

The Chevalier waited until he heard his nephew lock his door, and then returned to the salon, where half an hour later he rang the bell to inform the servant that his master had come in. The man had no suspicion of what had occurred, and the painful scene we have described remained a secret between the two Kerbséjeans.

V.

THE Chevalier de Kerbséjean slept but little that night ; he passed the long hours in sad reflection, his mind vexed by melancholy forebodings, and his heart filled with hot indignation. The insult that had been offered him was of no consequence ; he was far above the possibility of being wounded by anything of the kind ; but he was angry because this forgetfulness of respect due to his uncle showed to what a pitch of degradation Irène's father had fallen.

As often happens, when one acquires positive proof of a fact long suspected, the good man deduced from it exaggerated consequences, and made up his mind that the Count, weary of the constraint he had imposed upon himself, would soon carry within the doors of his home the deplorable habits toward which his nature seemed to draw him with irresistible force. Self-respect, family union—all that makes the honor, the happiness, and the welfare of a home—seemed to him for ever gone ; and he asked himself what decided step he should now take to preserve the tranquillity of his few remaining years and Irène's happiness.

His restlessness induced him to rise at an unusually early hour, and every one was asleep in the manor-house when he opened his window and leaned with both elbows on the stone balustrade

where for forty years he had listened, both morning and evening, to discover from which corner the wind blew, and the kind of weather it must be at sea. Almost at that moment some one knocked at the door of his chamber, and the Count appeared with a pale, sad face and eyes cast down.

"Uncle," he said, humbly, "I have come to make my apologies and to entreat you to pardon me for my conduct of last evening."

This spontaneous step immediately changed the Chevalier's way of thinking. His apprehensions were dissipated; his anger departed, and left in its place a certain indulgent pity. He held out his hand to his nephew and said simply :

"I have forgotten it."

The Count grasped his uncle's hand affectionately, saying with some agitation :

"If you allow, I will come and talk with you this evening."

"And where are you going now?" asked the Chevalier, seeing that his nephew was in riding costume.

"To Morlaix," he replied laconically.

The Chevalier easily understood that this day's expedition was connected with some new resolution or project, the details of which he should undoubtedly hear that evening, and that until that hour all explanation could be deferred.

"Very well," he said; "we will then frankly

discuss all these matters. But I do beg of you, Jean, not to be late in returning ; your daughter will be waiting for you. The poor child asks where you are every night, and is unwilling to retire until she has seen you."

As he heard these last words, the Count's face assumed a singular expression.

"Poor little thing !" he murmured. Then, turning on his heel, he ran down the stairs, and a moment later his horse was heard trotting down the avenue.

In another hour Irène, with her wide-brimmed straw hat on her head and carrying a light basket, came, as was her custom, to entice her Uncle Pierre into the garden. Generally, he was quite willing to go, and walked up and down the paths reading his newspaper, while his niece visited her poultry-yard and fed her gold-fish with biscuit. But this morning his mind was so preoccupied that he forgot to open the "Journal," and walked two or three times round the flower-garden without paying any attention to the gay chatter of Irène, who, sometimes running in front of him, sometimes hanging on his arm, pointed out to his observation an insect half hidden in a flower, some remarkable vegetable, or some magnificent fruit ripening on the wall.

While they took their usual morning walk, the window of a room next to that of Madame Gervais was gently opened, and a pale face ap-

peared ; it was Mimi, who had just risen. The evening before, on arriving at the manor, she had gone at once to the room that had been prepared for her, without opening her lips or looking about her. After having vainly tried to make her eat something, Madame Gervais hurried her to bed, fearing a new explosion of grief ; but the girl fell asleep at once, and passed an undisturbed night. The good governess went in and looked at her once or twice ; and, when she heard her moving in the morning, she opened the door and said kindly :

“Good-morning, my child. You are already dressed, I see. When you have said your prayers you can come to my room.”

“Prayers ! What prayers ? I do not know any,” replied Mimi.

“I will teach you one,” said Madame Gervais, with that true charity which nothing astonishes or repels. “Kneel here by my side.”

Natures like Mimi’s could never endure sorrow if it were not that their transports are as brief as they are violent. They are saved by the mutability of their impressions. The mountebank’s daughter experienced this relief at that very moment, and passed at once from a state of terrible despair to a sort of indifferent tranquillity. These few hours of repose sufficed to restore the equilibrium of all her faculties.

She did her best to repeat the morning prayers

with Madame Gervais ; but very soon, weary of remaining on her knees, she suddenly rose and went to the window.

"Would you like to go down into the garden?" asked Madame Gervais.

"Yes, when there is no one there," she answered. "I should like to walk alone in that garden."

"And why alone?"

"Because I do not know that old gentleman and the young lady, and because," she added with a sigh, "I like to be alone now that I am so sad!"

"Poor child!" murmured Madame Gervais compassionately.

"What will cure this ache here?" asked Mimi piteously pressing both hands on her breast.

"The good God, my child," answered the pious governess. "Turn to Him, and He will listen to your prayers." And as Mimi opened her eyes widely in astonishment, she added: "You do not understand me, I see; but example will teach you better than words, and you will soon learn what help the sick and sore-hearted find in labor and in prayer."

"I do not know how to labor nor to pray," the girl answered coldly.

"You will learn here, my poor child," replied Madame Gervais in the firm, quiet way that was natural to her.

The little gypsy shook her head and did not speak.

"You ate nothing last night," resumed the lady, glancing at the tray which stood untouched on the table. "Now try and swallow something."

Mimi obeyed, and began to eat the bits of bread and butter upon the plate; but at the first mouthful the recollection of the meal she had eaten with her father under the terrace returned to her, and she burst into tears. This time, however, her material needs triumphed over her grief, and even while she wept she ate all that was on the table. After this small comfort she seated herself near the windows looking out on the garden until the Chevalier and Irène entered the house. When she saw them no longer she crept down stairs and found her way to a quiet path nearly shut in by trees. All day long she lingered in this place. When Irène caught a glimpse of that desolate little figure, she was eager to go to her, but Madame Gervais checked her.

"No," she said, "not yet. She is a poor, crushed creature, and you must give her a little time to rise under this blow; and by-and-by she will be willing and able to receive some consolation."

It was eleven at night when the Count returned to the manor. His uncle, who had been looking for him from sundown, went to meet him, not without some fear of a renewal of the

scene of the night before, but was reassured at the first glance. The Count's face was calm, grave, and somewhat melancholy ; and for the time he looked almost like the handsome Kerbsé-jean of other days.

"You wished to speak to me," said the Chevalier, pressing his hand ; "but we cannot talk in this way—you in your riding-coat and spurs. Let us wait until to-morrow. You must be in need of repose."

"No, excuse me," answered Count Jean eagerly. "You never retire before midnight, and I am not in the least tired."

They entered the salon.

"Your daughter went to her room an hour ago," said the Chevalier as he closed the door, "and we are alone. Now, Jean, what have you to say to me ?"

"It was you, uncle, who wished to speak ; let me listen first to you," answered the Count deferentially.

The Chevalier hesitated a moment, like a person making up his mind to approach a delicate subject, and then said in an affectionate tone :

"I have often thought, my dear nephew, that a man of your age, whose only companions are a child and an old man, must feel his home very empty and his days very long. More than once, when I have seen your weariness and depression, I have felt inclined to urge you to leave us for

several months—to go to Paris, where you would find it very easy to renew agreeable friendships. But you always fought so shy of the subject, and refused so peremptorily before I could explain my feelings, that—”

“It is true, uncle ; and I have not the smallest inclination to return to the gay world and to society.”

“I know it ! I know it !” sighed the Chevalier.

“And,” continued the Count, “I am even astonished in these days that I could so long have submitted to the trammels which to-day I should find so irksome.”

“I have no intention of urging you to return to the world,” replied the Chevalier ; “but I have thought seriously of a plan which might restore to you a portion of that happiness of which you were so early deprived.”

And, as the Count gazed at him in amazement, the Chevalier added hastily :

“Tell me, Jean, have you never thought of marrying again ?”

“Never, uncle—never !”

“Well, then, I have for you. Do not shrink from this idea, I beg of you, but listen to me patiently. Yes, more than once I have turned over in my mind a vague project of marrying you again ; but to-day it has presented itself to me with redoubled force. It is hardly necessary for

me to say that the question of a stepmother for Irène is one of the first importance, also the age, position, and fortune of the lady. The person whom I propose has all the qualities which can assure the happiness of a good man. You know her already ; she is in fact a connection of yours by marriage, and was here once on a visit."

"Do you mean Mademoiselle de Kersalion ?" murmured the Count.

"Precisely. You remember her pretty face and slight figure. She was always compared to a lily."

"But that was fifteen years ago," said the Count under his breath.

"She is the only woman I know," continued his uncle in an agitated voice, "whom I consider worthy of replacing the wife you have lost. Our poor Amélie loved her very dearly; the same blood ran in their veins, and they were not unlike."

"They were not, indeed, and it has always been a matter of surprise to me that so charming a woman has never married."

"It has not been for lack of opportunity, but Madame de Kersalion always had a peculiar talent for getting rid of suitors. The good lady has always been a very great invalid, and whenever an aspirant presented himself she would weepingly implore her daughter not to leave her for the few remaining days she had to live. Of course her daughter yielded to these wishes so strongly

expressed, and for the last ten years her mother has kept her by the side of her couch."

"Do these ladies live in Paris still?"

"No; they remain all the year now at their country place at Neuilly. Mademoiselle de Kersalion has never been in society, one may say, and is quite reconciled to reside in this comparative solitude. From time to time I hear from them and write in return; to my letters Irène generally adds a few lines, and Mademoiselle de Kersalion loves the child, and has expressed a strong desire to see her. If her mother's infirmities allowed her to leave home, she would certainly have paid us a visit before this. I am quite sure of what I say; besides, she told me so in her very last letter. Madame de Kersalion ought to understand that she has no time to lose if she wishes to marry her daughter. Taking all these things into consideration, I think, my dear Jean, that you have but to ask; I am certain you will not be refused!"

The Count shook his head, but did not speak.

"Madame de Kersalion, of course, would never be separated from her daughter," continued the Chevalier; "but she could come here. When we three are no longer alone in this large room, when the family circle once more draws close around the fire, you, my poor Jean, will no longer go down to the shore to smoke your pipe, but will be as happy as you were once to remain with us."

The Count apparently had some difficulty in finding words to express himself, for he only answered by a gesture.

"You refuse?" said the Chevalier with some surprise, but with no displeasure. "Speak to me frankly, let me know what motives—"

"I have no motives except little lack of inclination," answered the Count abruptly. "Look here, uncle. The past is past. I know perfectly well that I can never again be happy in the same way that I was once. Even were you to find a wife for me who was altogether as perfect as Amélie, she would not be Amélie, I should not be attracted by her, and I should not know what to do to please her."

"You would prefer, perhaps, to marry some peasant girl?" said the Chevalier, coldly.

"I think it quite possible that I should suit a peasant girl better than a young lady," he answered, humored by the satire; "but I shall never marry any one."

"You will continue to live this same life!" cried the Chevalier with considerable indignation.

"No," answered his nephew—"by no means. And this is precisely what I have come to tell you. I wish to break up all my old habits at once, which I can only do by going away. I am not of an investigating disposition, nor am I fond of new people and new places. In short, I should never travel for the sake of traveling. I must have

some special aim. This aim is now the interest of my family. I will go to Bombay and arrange the business which has given you so much anxiety and trouble. I will look out for everything, and shall find considerable occupation, I fancy. You will wait for me tranquilly at home, and when I return it will then be time to think of marrying Irène."

The Chevalier was utterly confounded, for nothing was further from his thoughts than this proposition. He had said to himself, to be sure, more than once, that at his nephew's age he would gladly have made this voyage to the East Indies to augment his daughter's dowry; but it had never entered his mind to take the initiative and propose the plan, and still less to expect the Count to think of it himself.

"This, then, is the project at which you hinted," he said at last. "Have you been long thinking of it?"

"Yes, a long time," answered the Count with some hesitation, for what he said was not true; his resolution was not yet twenty-four hours old.

"It is a journey of three years, my dear Jean, and the project requires to be carefully weighed."

The Count declared that his determination was irrevocable.

"I went to Morlaix," he continued, "to make all necessary inquiries; here are the results," and he

drew a note-book from his pocket. "I shall probably go to England and take a vessel there."

"Do you mean to go immediately?" asked the Chevalier, somewhat disturbed.

"As soon as possible," answered his nephew. "You have told me hundreds of times never to postpone matters."

"But your absence will necessitate certain arrangements," observed the Chevalier. "We have accounts to settle, and I should have a power of attorney for you."

"The whole can be done in a day," replied the Count. "The day after to-morrow we will begin the preparation for my journey."

"Very well," answered the Chevalier; "all shall be as you will, only say nothing to Irène until the day you leave; it is no use to make the child miserable in advance."

Although the Count was not gifted with remarkable penetration, he easily understood that his uncle was not so much distressed by his departure as by the tears it would cause Irène to shed.

"Be tranquil," he answered sadly; "I will leave very quietly."

He rose as he spoke, and, with a glance at the clock, added: "Midnight already! Permit me to say good night to you, dear uncle."

"I will light you to your room," said the Chevalier, taking up a tall silver candlestick.

Before they left the salon, Monsieur Kerbséjean stopped and looked long and seriously at a picture of the Countess.

"Should I never return," he murmured, "Irène will regret that my portrait does not hang by the side of her mother's."

"What is that you say?" exclaimed the Chevalier. "Do not people always come back? Besides, there is ample time to have your picture painted. You are not going to-morrow!"

The two Kerbséjeans spent the next day in attending to business. In the afternoon they talked together on the terrace, and after dinner the Count went out as usual.

Two hours later, when it was quite dark, Catel Piolot, standing on the threshold of her door, heard a noise like the rapid gallop of a horse far in the distance. When she could hear this sound no longer, she drew out a letter hidden in the folds of a fichu and said half aloud: "Something extraordinary must be going on at the manor."

At that moment some one appeared on the little path leading up from the shore.

"Good evening, Crantin," she called, recognizing an old sailor, who almost every day smoked a half dozen pipes with the Count. "Are you coming from the cabaret so early as this? What's the news?"

"None of any consequence," he answered, stopping as he came to her gate.

"How is the Count?" resumed Cattel. "Has he been walking with you to-day?"

"Not to-day nor yesterday."

"What is he doing, then?"

"Well, just at this moment he is on horseback, and riding at full gallop," said the old sailor; "for I saw him not ten minutes ago, well on the road to Morlaix."

"He is gone!" muttered the old woman. "Just what I thought; and now I see why he bade me not deliver the letter until after dark. Holy Virgin! what on earth will the Chevalier say?"

VI.

THE Count had gone without saying farewell to his family. For several days the manor-house was very sad, but finally they determined to think only of the day when the traveler would return. Consequently their grief was checked before the Count had left the port from which he was to embark.

As soon as the Chevalier was relieved of all anxieties, he had time to occupy himself in some degree with Mimi's fate. The papers of the poor mountebank furnished ample indications by which they could find his relatives; they also revealed the vicissitudes of his precarious existence. His story was a pitiful and common one enough. He was

born in a little village in Languedoc, and was named Étienne Tirelon. Until the age of twenty-five he had been a barber, paying his taxes and license, and apparently established for life. One fine day he married, but, instead of taking an honest, simple country girl in his neighborhood, he took for his wife one of those traveling actresses who play in the open air, in tents, and in inns. This grand personage could not make up her mind to wash the barber's napkins and shaving-cups, but induced him almost immediately to close his shop and relinquish his business. The two then started forth to wander about the country, exhibiting their talents and living from hand to mouth.

Mimi came into the world on the side of the highway, and her mother died in one of those dens where travelers whose luggage is reduced to a few things tied in a handkerchief find refuge. After this last event Étienne Tirelon had a momentary idea of returning to his native village and opening his shop again; but the habits acquired during his nomadic life cut short this good inspiration.

He carried in his journeyings his guitar under his arm and his little girl on his back. Fortunately the child was of a healthy and vigorous constitution, and before long could toddle after her father on her stout little legs; and at four she danced and held out a tamborine to catch the sous

dropped in by sympathetic spectators. Continual exercise developed her strength early ; she was as elastic and light as a cat, and her father would himself cry out in wonder at her agility and strength, "Brava ! my bird—brava ! bravissima !" They had wandered in this way through France for years when the poor father died so sadly.

The Chevalier wrote to an uncle of Étienne Tirelon to convey the sad intelligence, and to inform him of Mimi's destitute condition. This Uncle Tirelon was an old mechanic, who was called, and with considerable truth, the most honest man in the village. He was a widower and childless ; but in default of direct descendants he was surrounded by the whole Tirelon family, which was very numerous, and regarded him as its chief.

It is only in the country, and far away from Paris, that the true mechanic or working class is to be met. The families of such, established in some little village, their trade descending from father to son, have the sensible notions, the humble virtues, the honorable sentiments and true dignity of character of which the example is set by the middle classes around them. It follows, therefore, naturally, that the *bourgeois* who lives on his income, or who exercises a liberal profession, regards as his equal the artisan who subsists by his manual labor. Their relations are natural and facile, for the country-bred workingman has none of the effrontery or degrading habits of the Pari-

sian *ouvrier*. Uncle Tirelon assembled a family council, and after considerable deliberation wrote to the Chevalier as follows :

“TO THE CHEVALIER DE KERBSÉJEAN :

“I write, in the name of the entire family, to thank you for the generosity with which you have assisted the child of my deceased nephew and godson, Étienne Tirelon. It was a time of great distress to us all when the young fellow, who up to that time had given us no cause for uneasiness, decided to marry as he did. He was a good fellow in the main, but the great trouble with him was that he was too easily influenced and did not like work. His weakness of character was such that he married a girl at whom he ought not even to have looked ; and then his natural inclination was so strong that he went away from us, hoping to earn his bread without trouble or fatigue. Although he never wrote to us himself, we knew what he had become from certain people who had seen him in Lyons, and we blushed to hear that he played his guitar and sang on the corners of the streets, picking up pennies like a beggar. Now that he is dead, it is of course our duty to pardon him, and we do so willingly, praying God at the same time to have mercy on his soul.

“As to the unfortunate little girl he left in this world, our intention is to do for her to the very best of our ability ; but it is impossible for

us to receive her into any one of our families. We have several reasons for this decision. The first is that we could never forget the mother who brought her into the world, and this remembrance would harden our hearts ; and when she grew up, this stain—for stain it is—would prevent us from finding some nice young fellow for her to marry. She, of course, could not be happy with us when she found herself despised and suspected. I ask as the greatest possible favor, therefore, sir, that you will finish the good work you have begun, and that you will take upon yourself the task of arranging the earthly lot of this poor creature. With your protection, she can find a home among people of our position in life, who, knowing nothing of her parents, will love her for herself if she conducts herself well and is lovable ; who will teach her, moreover, to earn her bread honorably. The family will pay all the necessary expenses, for we do not wish her to be a burden to any one. After having taken the liberty to make you understand our views, and had the boldness to ask so great a favor, I can only end, noble sir, by assuring you of the very great respect of

“Your very humble servant,

“JEAN ÉTIENNE TIRELON.”

The Chevalier sent for Madame Gervais, and, showing her this letter, asked her advice.

“The man is quite right,” said this most sen-

sible woman. "Poor little Mimi would not be happy among these relatives, because there is nothing in her with which they could sympathize. She would shock them at every turn."

"The wandering life she has led was not, I fear, calculated to elevate her character."

"She is as pure as a new-born babe," interrupted Madame Gervais eagerly. "Totally without religious training, and utterly uneducated, she has at least preserved her maidenly purity of thought."

"I do not precisely see to whom we can confide the child," resumed the puzzled Chevalier; "there is not a person here. We must apprentice her at Morlaix."

Madame Gervais shook her head. "She would not stay there one week," she said. "They would send her back here, because she is utterly incapable of assiduous application. Since you permit me to give you my advice, I am inclined to counsel you to keep her here. We will try and teach her. Irène would be overjoyed at the idea, and at having some new interest; for her father's departure will long weigh heavily on her heart. Mimi will amuse her, and—"

"She will certainly have a most singular *demoiselle de compagnie*," interrupted the Chevalier, with a smile. "Never mind, I think you are quite right. The child's life will be, I fancy, pleasanter here than anywhere else. You will teach

her to be something—a seamstress, chambermaid, or whatever you see fit. Anything would be better for her than the life she led with her father.”

And thus it came to pass that Mimi Tirelon remained under the Kerbséjeans’ roof.

Good Madame Gervais at once applied herself to the duty of educating that ignorant, untutored nature. She pursued the task with the ardor of a truly charitable soul, and in the beginning her labors were not without success.

Mimi had a sort of eager intelligence, which rendered her, in spite of her excessive indolence, susceptible of instruction. She learned to read with wonderful quickness, and at the end of a few months could even write a passable letter ; but there her progress stopped. Her language and manners were also dignified ; she imitated unconsciously the persons by whom she was surrounded, and it would have been difficult to discover the street-dancer in this young girl, with her modest, reserved bearing and measured speech. Nevertheless, she had by no means changed as much as her exterior would lead one to suppose ; the penetrating Madame Gervais knew this, and sometimes said with a sigh to the Chevalier :

“This child has nothing in her heart or in her mind. I honestly believe she loves nothing in the world, not even Irène, who is so good to her. I doubt if she has ever had one serious thought of the next world ; and, when she prays to God

Almighty, she prays with her lips only. She is by no means lacking in intelligence, and yet it is irksome to her to open a book ; nor does she like any manual labor whatever. Were she abandoned to her own devices I can't imagine how she would employ her days."

"In doing nothing," replied the Chevalier, philosophically. "She is as indolent as a snake. How could you expect anything else? She is naturally lazy, and has never done anything in her life but wander along the streets and highways. You have undertaken to reform both her natural and acquired habits. You have a hard task before you, my dear Madame Gervais."

"That is true," she answered with a placid smile ; "but, if it were never difficult to do good, where would the merit be in our exertions?"

Mimi never uttered her father's name, nor did she speak even indirectly of her early years. One would have said that her existence dated from the day when she entered the Kerbséjean mansion. Her face had acquired a totally new expression. She was serious, cold, and almost impassible ; and more extraordinary still was the fact that nothing in her bearing would have led one to suspect the muscular strength and elasticity which was in a great degree her birthright, and which had been carefully cultivated by her education. This girl, who had passed her childhood in athletic exercise, now walked slowly and indolently as if easily

fatigued. When they were walking, Irène would lightly skip over the stones in a deep brook, and when on the other side would turn and call Mimi. But Mimi would not make the faintest attempt to follow her, but would go with the Chevalier sedately on until they reached the plank with the hand-rail, preferring thus to avoid the obstacle she could leap at a single bound. It was easy to see that all this was part of a deliberate course of action, and not a matter of preference. Mimi profited by hours when she was alone to stretch her muscles ; for a curious servant had seen her through the keyhole pirouetting in the salon, and flourishing the Chevalier's cane about her head.

Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean had not for Mimi that tender friendship and earnest affection which can not exist without a certain similarity of education and character. She made of her neither her companion nor her friend ; and yet she loved her—loved her from habit, and possibly, too, because there was no other person near her of her own age. Mimi was rarely with her when she worked at her embroidery, but they were together always in the garden ; and almost every day the Chevalier took them both to walk with him. A certain sort of intimacy was naturally born of this companionship. Irène addressed Mimi with the familiar French “thou,” and Mimi did not always remember to address her as Mademoiselle ; and she always announced her opinions on any and all

subjects with the most absolute independence. In fact, very often it was Irène who deferred to Mimi in their little differences ; for a certain generous instinct made her very careful not to wound the girl's feelings.

The Chevalier had no especial liking for his *protégée*. She had precisely the faults of which he was least tolerant ; not that he ever regretted the hospitality he had extended, or ceased to think that he would increase the small dowry that he hoped to obtain for her from Uncle Tirelon.

Although life at the manor was singularly monotonous and secluded, it was not wearisome or stupid. The arrival of a letter by the India mail was a great event, looked forward to for two or three months, and when it came caused an inexpressible joy. The Count's letters were brief, the sterility of his mind being more evident in his letters than in his conversation ; but the letters were none the less extremely welcome. Irène's eyes filled with tender tears as she read them, and the Chevalier had sudden spasms of affection for his nephew.

The traveler was doing wonders in disentangling the troublesome matters in regard to which he took this journey ; he was recovering the money which was supposed to be lost ; his health had not suffered in the slightest degree from the climate of India. He regretted Brittany, however, and, without fixing any date, spoke in each letter of his return.

VII.

YEARS slipped away with insensible rapidity, when one fine morning the Chevalier announced, with almanac in hand, that it was precisely four years since the departure of his nephew.

That day Irène came down rather earlier than usual; and, as she kissed her uncle tenderly, he was struck by her manner.

“Have you received a letter?” he asked.

“No, dear uncle,” answered the girl; “but last year on this anniversary I was very sad when I woke, but to-day I am so happy that I feel sure that my father will be at home within the year.”

“I had the same notion myself,” replied the Chevalier.

“Ah!” said Irène, “yet a little longer and he will be here! He will occupy his vacant chair, and I shall sit between you always—!”

“Always!” repeated the Chevalier, with a melancholy smile. “Child, I am growing old.”

“No, no!” cried Irène, struck to the heart by this reflection and looking at him with tears in her eyes. He kissed her fair brow and led her down to the garden. She in a few minutes was as happy as ever, but he was a little thoughtful and sad, as if some vague apprehension marred his hopes.

The same day the Chevalier said as he rose from the breakfast table :

“Dear child, we have a visit to make—a visit of charity. They came to tell me last night that Cattel Piolot is very ill.”

“Let us go at once, dear uncle ; we can carry her some trifles which she probably would not have in her house.”

“Will you take Mimi ? ” asked the Chevalier.

“Mimi ? Oh no. The poor child has never been inside that house since the day she left it. If she should ever go there again, it would bring all the past back to her.”

“Do you think, then, that it made such a powerful impression ? ”

“Do I think so ? Oh ! dear uncle, I am certain of it. I can see her now. You surely remember her despair when we first saw her—her tears and screams.”

“I remember it, of course,” answered the Chevalier ; “and, now that I know her, I am astonished she took the trouble to weep for her father.”

On reaching Cattel Piolot’s door, the Chevalier and his niece heard the sound of voices within ; but all became silent as soon as they lifted the iron knocker. A neighbor opened the door.

“Ah ! ” she exclaimed, “the good Lord sent you here ! ” And then in a low voice she added :

"Perhaps you can soften her heart ; perhaps she will listen to you."

"Who is there ?" said the sick woman from the inclosed bed.

"It is I, dear Cattel," answered Irène, going toward her. "It is so long since we saw you at the manor that my uncle and I thought we would come this morning and see how you are, and what had prevented your coming to the manor."

The old woman lifted herself a little from the bag stuffed with straw that did duty as a pillow, and replied in a hoarse voice :

"It is a great joy and a great honor to see you here. Ah ! the Kerbséjeans never forget the poor. They are sure to appear when there is trouble. I am very feverish, dear young lady—very feverish ; and my throat is as parched and burnt as if I had swallowed nothing for a fortnight." Then, seeing Irène take out the contents of her basket, she added : "And did you bring me those sweetmeats and all those nice things ? You are as good as an angel. But my throat aches."

"Do not fatigue yourself by talking," said Irène, seating herself near the bed. "You are going to have cool lemonade made—"

"There must be some brandy put in," interrupted Cattel Pilot. "You did not bring any, but never mind—I have some here, put away carefully. Come close, and I will tell you where."

"What more can I do for you," said Irène

kindly, paying no attention to those last words of the sick woman, regarding them as a mere whim.

“Have you sheets enough?”

This question evidently wounded Cattel Piolot's pride. On the bed there was one tattered sheet and a lambskin, and Cattel hastily answered:

“Sheets enough! Why, I have bales and bales of linen, and just as much English cotton, to say nothing of whole pieces of nainsook, and dimity, and India percale.” She stopped in the midst of this long list of names, glanced nervously at the door, and continued in a whisper: “But we must not talk about that now; for I am tied down to my bed, and am no longer mistress. But I shall be up again soon, and I will show you some things then which will astonish you a little, I fancy. I am not very sick after all. Eh! eh! He who counts on dead men's shoes is likely to go barefooted all his life.”

At that moment the Chevalier, who had waited outside, came in to say a word to the sick woman.

“I congratulate you, Cattel Piolot,” he said. “It must be a great comfort to you to have your grandson at home again.”

She looked at him in astonishment, and then exclaimed, “Good Heavens! yes, that vagabond has returned. I never prayed God to send me that comfort, I assure you! and when he entered this morning I felt as if I had received my death-stroke.”

"And why, pray?" asked the Chevalier calmly.

"Because I saw at a glance that he was steeped in vices of all kinds," she answered violently. "I was not in the least mistaken when I predicted that he would fall into utter degradation! He wears a coat, sir—a coat of fine blue cloth—and a silk vest! And has boots on his feet just like any lord, if you will believe me, sir!"

"Would you prefer to see him return in rags?" asked the Chevalier with a smile.

"But that is not all!" she continued with growing exasperation. "He has a mustache. A mustache! He, a Piolot, with a mustache! and without one sous in his pocket—with nothing but what he has on his back."

"He is still young enough to settle down and make money," said the Chevalier in a conciliating tone. "Be indulgent toward him, Cattel. When you were young, you spent what you earned."

"Never!" she cried energetically — "no, never!"

"Then you must have saved heaps of money," said Irène naïvely.

"A few sous, mademoiselle—only a few sous," murmured the old woman. "I tell you this because I know you will not betray me. But do not tell any one."

"Your grandson has not returned to rob you, nor to mount guard over his inheritance," re-

sumed the Chevalier, "be sure of that ; for he believes, like everybody else, that you are very poor."

"He is right ; I *am* very poor," she cried in a loud voice.

"Precisely," continued the Chevalier ; "consequently Célestin means to work for you both. There is a good deal to be done at the manor ; I will employ him, and he will earn his three or four francs each day."

"A crown and more !" exclaimed Cattel Piot, suddenly appeased. "Well ! that makes me feel much better."

"He will cost you very little," continued the Chevalier, "and will on the contrary aid you in a great many ways. So pray do not treat him so unkindly as you did this morning. He is in the little outside room, and very unhappy. Do you not wish him to come to you ?"

"Not until he has taken off his fine coat. After he went away I locked up his clothes—good clothes, well patched and mended. He can put those on."

"Put those on," repeated the Chevalier. "You seem to forget that he has grown a full head, and is broader in proportion."

"Then his clothes would be too tight," exclaimed Cattel ; "he must not try to get into them : he would tear them all to pieces. I can find something he can wear—a jacket of his grand-

father's, who was a stout man, you remember. If I could only get up, I could find plenty for him."

As she spoke she tried to sit up and to struggle off the bed, for she had lain down all dressed; but Irène covered her up and insisted on her remaining quiet.

"No, Cattel," she said; "do not fatigue yourself. I assure you, if you are imprudent now, you will make yourself seriously ill."

"But I must hunt up that jacket," she answered excitedly; "and I do not choose to have Célestin prowling round among my boxes. I have not the smallest confidence in him."

"Have you any confidence in me?" said Irène with a smile.

"Holy Virgin! what a question!"

"Well, then, let me look for what you want. Where is the jacket?"

"You must first send every one out of the room and lock the door," whispered Cattel.

Irène summoned the good neighbor who was sitting at the other side of the room and gave her some trifling commission to execute, and the Chevalier himself locked the door after her.

"Am I to look here?" asked Irène, going toward the armoire.

Cattel shook her head and pointed to the darkest corner of the room.

"You will find a door there—a door without

lock or hinges : it opens with a sliding panel and a spring."

Irène looked closely at the woodwork, and then without the smallest hesitation pressed her finger on a brass-headed nail.

"Good heavens ! Did you find it so easily as that ?" said the old woman with an uneasy start.

"Don't be troubled," answered Irène. "I might have searched for hours if we did not have at the manor a hiding-place that opened in the same way, which goes to prove, my dear Cattel, that the same workman built your house and ours."

She touched the spring as she spoke, and the oak plank slowly moved and showed the entrance to a dark recess, long and deep, at the extreme end of which was a faint streak of light as if from a ventilator.

"The jacket ought to be in a box down there," said Cattel, raising herself on her elbow ; "I had it in my hands not two weeks since."

Irène pushed her way cautiously through a confused pile of boxes and bales of merchandise, which exhaled that faint mysterious perfume peculiar to things that come over the sea and from the East. Many generations of smugglers must have contributed to the foundations of this mass, for there were stuffs there which had not seen the light for a hundred years.

The box which Cattel had designated was one

of those quaint inlaid boxes of rare wood which come from South America, and had probably been on board some Spanish or Portuguese ship that had been wrecked on this dangerous coast, and some of the Piolots had rescued it from the waves. Irène turned the silver key that was in the lock, lifted the cover, and began her search. The best clothes of the defunct Pilot were carefully folded, while his hat seemed to be his wife's savings bank, for it was full of crowns and louis d'or. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean glanced at this little treasure, and, taking the jacket, hastened back to Cattel.

The old woman had fallen back exhausted upon her pillow. She put out her hand to take the jacket, saying, with an anxious look toward the recess, "Dear lady, shut it well; for you know—"

"Do not be troubled," answered Irène; "it is all right, and no one can find it. Now shall we call your grandson?"

"Not yet, not yet," she murmured, closing her eyes.

Mademoiselle Kerbséjean did not insist. She took a seat near the bed and began to hem a new fichu that she had bought to replace the miserable cotton rag that Cattel usually wore over her shoulders.

The Chevalier began to speak to the woman again of her duty toward her grandson; but, see-

ing her look so ill, he drew the curtain of the bed, hoping that she would fall asleep, and took a chair by the side of his niece. They were talking together in whispers when Célestin Piolot softly opened the door. Irène instantly recognized this tall fellow, whom she had seen every day of his life when she was a child ; he had often brought her shells. She nodded to him in a friendly way, and made a sign that his grandmother was asleep. He did not dare to cross the threshold, but stood leaning against the frame, looking at Mademoiselle Kerbséjean with great astonishment, for he had no idea who she was.

Irène understood his hesitation. She rose, and, shaking out the folds of her crisp pink cambric dress, went toward him.

“How do you do, Célestin ?” she said in the sweet Breton patois and with kind familiarity. “I see that you do not recognize the young lady who wished to give you her dolls in exchange for the pretty pebbles you brought to her.”

Célestin Piolot blushed to the tips of his ears, and passed his hand through his hair as if to gain time.

“Pardon me,” he said in French ; “I did not recall you at first, but I now remember you perfectly. Mademoiselle, how do you do ?”

“I am very well,” she answered, repressing a smile.

“I am very glad,” he replied solemnly.

"Would to heaven that all the world was as well as myself!" resumed Irène. "Poor Cattel seems to be very ill."

"I thought her grown much older," said Célestin.

"You have come back just in time to take care of her," continued the young lady. "I know that she did not receive you very cordially, but my uncle has spoken to her on the subject, and when she is better he will say something more; and I am convinced that she will do differently."

"She is a terrible woman," said the young mechanic; "she has such strange ideas, sometimes, that I think she can't be quite right in her head."

"Be gentle with her, and submissive, and all will go smoothly," answered Irène, seeing that he wore a blouse instead of the blue coat which Cattel Piolot had found so objectionable. "Come in softly and take a chair by her bed. When she wakes my uncle will say a few words to her, and then you can speak."

Célestin hesitated.

"She received me with insults," he answered, "though heaven only knows why—I do not. I have no intention of asking anything of her. I know she is poor, and I expect nothing but kind words; but, as she does not choose to give me these, I think I had best take myself off again this very day."

“No, do not do that,” interposed Irène hastily. “Believe me when I say that you will never repent having remained with your grandmother. Do not leave her ; your duty is here as well as your interest.”

He yielded to this advice, expressed with imperious kindness, and took a seat in a corner where the sick woman could not see him. Irène resumed her work and her talk with her uncle. Occasionally she looked at Célestin, and he understood that they were speaking of him.

“Cattel ought to be proud of that young fellow,” said the Chevalier ; “he is really a very handsome man !”

“He looks like the figure representing King Murat, that we once saw at the fair,” said Irène with childish artlessness.

“He has some education too, I fancy ; for while I was talking to him down stairs I saw the corner of a book sticking out of his knapsack.”

Here the sick woman stirred, and instantly Irène and her uncle were at her side.

“Well, Cattel, how do you feel now ?” asked the Chevalier.

“Better ! thanks be to God,” she answered. “To-morrow I shall be on my feet again perhaps.”

“We hope so, but in the mean time keep both mind and body very quiet.”

“Here is some one who is anxious to serve you

and to relieve you of every care," added Irène. "Do you not wish to see your grandson?"

Cattel Piolot shook her head. The Chevalier beckoned to Célestin, who obeyed and stood by his grandmother's side. He exhibited much feeling, and leaning over her took her hand. She turned her glazed eyes upon him.

"Can it be," she said, speaking with difficulty, "that this fine gentleman is really the son of my poor boy Corentin Piolot. His mustache changes him so much that I—"

She made him a sign to withdraw, and turned away her head.

"My good lad," said the Chevalier, looking at Célestin's mustache and full black beard, "your grandmother will never kiss you until you have shaved."

"And she will be much pleased," added Irène gently. "Go quick!"

When he had departed the sick woman opened her eyes and feebly stretched out her arm.

"Where is the jacket?" she said. "Now that he has a blouse, it is not worth while giving him the jacket."

Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean and her uncle exchanged a look. It seemed to them that the old woman was so clear-headed that she would probably be stirring about the next day.

"What is that?" she asked as Irène laid the new fichu on the ragged bed coverings.

"It is a fichu to put over your shoulders when you are up again."

"Thanks ; but it is too fine for me," she murmured, touching the stuff with the tips of her bony fingers.

The Chevalier rose. "You are better already, my good Cattel. Keep up your courage, and you will be all right in a few days."

"Good-by, Cattel," added Irène, as she tied the ribbons of her dainty straw hat. "We will come again to see you to-morrow."

"To-morrow early," said the Chevalier ; "and I shall be very glad to find your grandson taking care of you."

As soon as they were gone Cattel Piolot staggered to her feet with the jacket in her hand, determined to put it back in its hiding-place, and with it her new fichu. She dragged herself to the other end of the room, and succeeded in opening the recess ; but at that moment she was seized with a great dizziness and fell unconscious on the floor.

When Célestin came in fifteen minutes later, he saw his grandmother stretched out motionless with her face on the ground. The boy called for help and ran to lift her. She was still breathing ; her pale lips opened, and she murmured some incoherent words. Célestin thought she was better ; but as he raised her in his arms she died.

VIII.

CÉLESTIN PILOT was the sole heir of his grandmother. She left him about twelve thousand francs in good solid money, and the old house, with its quaint bits of furniture dating from the time of the Dukes of Brittany, and its garden, which had never been spaded within the memory of man, and had become a tiny wilderness overgrown by burdocks and couch-grass. This small fortune dazzled the young mechanic. Like all persons accustomed to live from hand to mouth, he overrated the value of money, and these pieces of silver and gold seemed to him an inexhaustible mine of wealth. He installed himself in his house, making no alterations in its interior, and retained in his service the good woman who had nursed Cattel Pilot during her brief illness. This housekeeper, if so she may be called, was the widow of one of the coast-guards. She had traveled a little, and could speak French. She now lived in clover, for taking care of the house and cooking Célestin's simple dinner was a very small matter; and she was able to spend the greater part of the afternoons in her dear delight of running from house to house with her knitting.

In the beginning of the new order of things, Célestin Pilot had manifested a certain dislike to the society of the people about him. He had not

once been seen at the café, he never invited a human being within his doors, and went out in the evening merely to take a solitary walk on the shore. As the report got about that Cattel Piot had left heaps of money, the good people in the neighborhood were extremely interested in all that her heir did or did not do ; and they gladly encouraged Magni, the old servant, to talk. She did not require much urging to tell all she knew about her young master.

“It is difficult to describe Célestin,” as she familiarly called him. “He is not exactly simple, and neither is he very wise. He does not care to talk. All day long he roams round the house, or lies under the pear-tree in the garden and stares at the clouds. Occasionally he reads a little ; but as to doing anything with his hands, why, it is as if he had none. He would see the very roof fall down on his head rather than drive a nail to keep it up. His taste leads him to take care of his person. Every morning he takes a bath and brushes his hair like a lord, and his clothes are always clean. But it is for himself alone that he takes all these pains, for he only goes out in the evening, and then merely to the shore. I have noticed, moreover, that he goes a good bit out of his way to avoid passing the coast-guard station. You see he does not care to encounter all the people who are always to be seen there. If by chance he meets any one who says ‘good evening,’

don't imagine that he returns it ! By no means ; he just touches his hat, and goes on as proud as if he were a Kerbséjean."

The Chevalier scrupulously fulfilled all social duties toward his humblest neighbors ; and the week after the funeral he came as a matter of course to offer his condolences to Cattel Piolot's grandson. Some time after this the young workman presented himself at the manor house to return that visit. It was in the afternoon ; the gay June sun darted its rays obliquely through the level slats of the green blinds. The room was fresh and cool. The Chevalier, sitting in his large arm-chair, was reading aloud from a book of travels in the East Indies, while his niece, leaning over her embroidery frame, listened with silent attention. A little apart Madame Gervais, with a large basket of colored wools on her knees, was selecting the shades for a bunch of roses which Irène was embroidering, and then winding them into balls ; while Mimi, before her, with the skeins on her extended arms, stood in a listless attitude, with her head turned away, and her eyes fixed on the distant sea.

A charming picture might have been made with the figures thus grouped, and each taken separately would have been a good model for an artist. The Chevalier's head would have made an admirable study, his well-cut features and stately form giving him the air of one of Corneille's.

characters ; while Madame Gervais, in her black dress and white linen sleeves and collar, was a good representation of the pious ladies of the fifteenth century. Irène's remarkable beauty, her tall slender figure, and chestnut hair with its sunny lights, suggested the days of chivalry. Such had been the ladies of King Arthur's court, the blonde queen Genevra and the white-handed Iseult. At the first glance this radiant beauty threw into shadow Mimi's pale, dark face ; but after a while one discovered that the mountebank's daughter had superb eyes, large and of velvety softness, beautiful features, an exquisite mouth, and a well-moulded figure. The simple costume she always wore was admirably suited to her quiet face ; and just now she was very charming in a violet dress with her white fichu and a black ribbon tying her luxuriant hair.

" Ah ! " she suddenly exclaimed, as she caught sight of Célestin ringing at the gate ; " there is Cattel Piolot's grandson."

" Do you know him ? " asked Irène in surprise.

" Of course," was the reply ; " I saw him one evening when he was walking ; he bowed to Madame Gervais, who was on the terrace. I know him very well, although he is dressed so finely to-day."

" He is in mourning, Mimi ; you do not call that fine, do you ? " said the governess in a tone of grave reproof.

"He is all in black," continued the girl heedlessly, "with a beautiful white cravat like Monsieur Songemain, the notary, when he comes to pay his visit on New Year's day."

The Chevalier took off his spectacles, and closed his book. In a moment more Célestin appeared. He advanced rapidly to the center of the room, took off his hat, which he had carefully avoided leaving in the anteroom, and bowed profoundly like an actor in one of the Porte Saint-Martin dramas. The poor boy had frequented the theatres, and supposed he was doing quite the proper thing, and that it was thus that people in the best society entered a drawing-room.

"Take a chair, my dear Piolot," said the Chevalier, half rising and designating a fauteuil by his side. "I am charmed to see you."

Célestin had made a great effort to execute his entrée ; but after that first step was accomplished, which to be sure was the most difficult, his courage and assurance suddenly took wings ; he tripped against a piece of furniture, and found himself as he recovered his balance in front of the embroidery frame, which he almost threw down as he turned.

"Good morning, Célestin," said Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean, suppressing a smile. "I begged my uncle to say to you how sincerely I sympathized with you in your affliction. You are well, I trust ?"

"Perfectly well, Mademoiselle," he answered in a strangled voice, as he tried to find his way out of the triangle formed by the governess and the two young girls.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down!" repeated the Chevalier, moved by compassion for the youth's embarrassment. "It is very warm out to-day, is it not?"

"Very warm," he replied, still in the same tone, as he finally made up his mind to pass before Madame Gervais to reach the chair that had been pointed out to him. In doing so, however, he carried off on the buttons of his coat the skein of wool the governess was winding. Célestin endeavored to disentangle it, and finally seated himself with it in his fingers, a melancholy picture of blushes and confusion.

"Never mind," said Irène, stooping to find the ball that had rolled toward her feet; "but speak to this little simpleton, who amuses herself by barring people's path with pink wool!"

Mimi was laughing immoderately, without paying the smallest heed to the signs the governess made, or to the annoyance of the Chevalier. When she in some degree had recovered her composure, she walked directly to the young man, and standing in front of him she said, as she held out her wrists—

"Have the kindness, sir, to give me the wool."

"Most willingly," he stammered, extending the

skein. She, however, shook her head impatiently, with a little gesture implying that he must reëstablish things in the state he had found them. When at last he awkwardly obeyed, she made him a profound curtsy, then crossed the room, and took her stand again before Madame Gervais.

"Upon my life!" murmured the Chevalier, "she is not troubled by timidity."

Célestin by this time was more at his ease, and the Chevalier encouraged him by his kind familiarity.

"Now," he said, "that you have received your grandmother's little fortune, you intend, I presume, to establish yourself here?"

"I do not yet know precisely what I shall do," answered Célestin. "Life is not very agreeable in the country, particularly for a person who has seen anything of the world."

"Ah! But that, after all, depends on how one looks at things. Where would you prefer to live?"

"In Paris."

"You are wrong, my boy, very wrong—altogether wrong," replied the Chevalier, with considerable energy. "Think of your position. With what you have, and what you can make by working at your trade, you could live here with every comfort, and in a way that three times the amount would not permit in a city. If you went to some

little expense in your house, you would be better lodged than any one among the middle classes in Paris, who pay besides the most frightful rents. A workingman in Paris is compelled to live in a garret. I know it all—the whole story. I know the capital, moreover, most thoroughly, and I assure you positively that it is the most unhealthy place in the world for you—for any young man. They all lose themselves there, body and soul. The corruption is all-pervading—the corruption of bad traditions and pernicious examples.”

After this outburst Célestin did not dare to say that he had spent three years in Paris, and that he regretted the life in the attic and the workshop of which the Chevalier had spoken with such intense bitterness and indignation.

“Just now,” he resumed, “I have no plans. It will be time for me to decide where to establish myself when I am weary of this place.”

“That time can not be far off,” observed Irène. “You live alone, I am told.”

“I have books, and they are the best companions,” said Célestin, sententiously.

“You take advantage of your leisure hours, and spend them in study? That is very wise,” said the Chevalier. “I have a passably good library, which I will place at your disposal with the greatest possible pleasure. What authors do you prefer?”

“I am particularly partial to poetry,” answered

Célestin, evasively. "There are some good verses written by Auguste Ravachon."

"Ah! I don't think I know that poet," said the Chevalier, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps he has not written much," added Irène.

"Not very much," answered Célestin. "He is a friend of mine. His poems have never been printed, but I have a copy of several of them, one in particular, a 'satire on Power.' It begins in this way :

'S'il fallait t'incenser, je briserais ma lyre.'"

"My dear Piolot, you can do better than that. Do you know the old authors, those that are called the classics?"

"I have heard of them, I believe," answered the young man with light disdain.

"I will lend you these works later. Just now they would be too strong for you, I fear. You must begin with simple food. Come some day and look at my library with me, and we will find something for you."

Célestin expressed his gratitude by a stiff inclination of his whole body. This desire to instruct him and develop his tastes was not appreciated by him, but he decided that it was not precisely the time for further quotations from his friend Ravachon, and prudently dropped the subject.

"Nature is beautiful at this season," he began in stately fashion, as he glanced from the window.

"It is always beautiful in Brittany," answered the Chevalier. "As soon as the early frosts have carried off the leaves from the trees, the furze comes into bloom; and in midwinter the land has a look of spring."

"It is a sight of which the eyes never weary," said Célestin in pompous phraseology. "Nature is admirable in all forms. I have a friend who is an artist; he paints landscapes from nature. I have been with him and seen him paint. It was in my presence that he began his great picture for the Exposition. It was magnificent! bewildering! Well! it was rejected. A picture on which he had spent three months: which would have given him a reputation and made his fortune! He took it away of course, and then the false friends who had praised it picked it to bits. They went so far as to call this superb picture spinach and eggs. I really thought he would lose his mind."

"Poor fellow! And what became of the picture?" asked Irène.

"The picture! Oh! fortunately it was a landscape, as I told you. He painted a beautiful cow in the very middle and a few chickens in the foreground, and sent it to his father, who has a farm at Montmartre. The good man of course believed it was painted expressly for him to place on his

door, and at this very day it serves as a sign to the dairy of Père Robinot."

The visit was prolonged until the hour for dinner was near at hand. Célestin knew very well it was time for him to go, but how to take himself out of the room was now in his eyes a very difficult problem. He fidgeted on his chair and twisted his hat about in his hands until all semblance of a hat had fled. Then at last, as if moved by a spring, he started to his feet and said, as he passed his hand through his hair with an attempt at carelessness :

"The hour grows late. With your permission I will retire !"

"Good-by, my dear Piolot; *aurevoir*"; "Good-by, Célestin"; "Good-by, Monsieur Célestin," said the Chevalier, Mademoiselle Kerbséjean, and Mimi all together.

"Do not disturb yourself—do not disturb yourself," repeated the young man as he succeeded in reaching the door without any especial accident. After he was gone, Mimi watched until he passed out of the gate.

"Who on earth would think he was the grandson of that ugly, ragged old Cattel? He has gloves and a watch-chain !"

"Do you think him good-looking?" asked Irène.

"Certainly I do," the girl answered. "He is not in the least like a workingman."

The same day after dinner Irène drew her uncle to a remote corner of the terrace, and, seating herself by his side, said in a mysterious tone :

“Uncle, I have a splendid idea !”

“Indeed, my child ! and what may it be ?”

“Do you know that I think it would be a good plan to marry Mimi to Célestin Piolot ?”

The Chevalier shook his head and opened his snuff-box, his invariable resource in times of hesitation and perplexity.

“Your idea is not absolutely unwise, my dear,” he said at last ; “but I see nevertheless many difficulties in the way. I cannot of course propose this marriage to Célestin ; he must think of it himself.”

“That is true,” murmured Irène.

“He may think of it if he stays here,” continued the Chevalier ; “but in the mean time not a word in regard to the project must be said to Mimi.”

“Of course not,” answered Irène eagerly. “She must not have the least suspicion.”

“You feel anxious in regard to Mimi’s future lot ?” said the Chevalier after a long silence.

“Yes, uncle, I do indeed. I love the poor child, and should like to see her happy.”

“She is not bad at heart,” said the Chevalier, “but she presents a strong illustration of nature unconquered by education.”

“If we had had her when she was very little,” replied Irène with a smile, “she would not now be so wild.”

IX.

SOME days after this, the Chevalier, Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean, and Mimi were walking on the shore at low tide. After strolling about for an hour or more, they stopped at a spot where the rocks defined a perfect circle. Several blocks of granite, detached from their parent cliffs by the perpetual washing of the waves, and half buried in the shifting sand, formed seats which were accidentally arranged around a long, flat stone which the Chevalier always spoke of as “my niece’s divan.” This place was often the termination of their walk, and they lingered there to rest a while before they turned their faces again homeward. They often lunched there, too, on black bread and fruit which they obtained at a farm-house close by. It was Mimi who generally managed this little transaction. This morning she came back, contrary to her usual custom, running and out of breath.

“Do you know,” she said as soon as she could speak, “that I saw Monsieur Célestin? he is coming this way, too!”

“So much the better!” answered Irène gayly; “he will show us where to find some shells.”

"Shells for the fountain in the garden?" exclaimed Mimi. "Why, we have already gathered baskets full."

"And you, Laziness!" answered Irène, laughing, "have never taken the trouble to bring me one!"

Célestin now appeared. He bowed stiffly and was going on when Mademoiselle Kerbséjean spoke to him.

"Not so fast, Célestin," she cried in a tone of gay familiarity, "come here; we want you to do something for us."

"I am entirely at your service," he stammered as he approached.

"My uncle has been turning over the sand for the last hour with his cane in hopes of finding some shells for our rockery in the garden; but he has been entirely unsuccessful. Can you help us?"

"Most gladly, mademoiselle," answered the young man eagerly.

"But we must lunch first," said Mimi, drawing from her basket a loaf of rye bread, some superb apricots and brown pears.

The Chevalier greeted the young man kindly, and when Mimi had properly arranged the fruit on green leaves he invited Célestin to be seated, saying with a laugh, "The table is laid, and mademoiselle is waiting."

Mademoiselle cut with her own hands the coarse black bread, and handed a slice to Céles-

tin, who accepted it with diffidence, saying as she did so, "My uncle never eats lunch; and as to Mimi, I believe she would rather die of hunger than eat a crumb of black bread!"

"But that stuff is not bread," answered Mimi with a look of disgust.

"You prefer fruit?" returned Irène kindly. "Well, then, help yourself and offer it to Célestin."

Mimi presented the basket to the young man. He took an apricot, and then looked round to find a place where he could sit.

"The chairs are a trifle far apart!" said Irène with a laugh; and in fact the larger bench on which she and Mimi were sitting was at a considerable distance from the other stones.

"I will make room for you," cried Mimi, drawing her skirts together so as to leave an empty space between herself and Mademoiselle Kerbsé-jean, who in her turn moved a little as if to second Mimi's invitation.

"You are very good, Mademoiselle Mimi," said the young man in great confusion, as he took his place, with his elbows glued to his sides, and holding himself severely erect.

"You are not eating," said Mimi patronizingly.

"Yes, indeed, Mademoiselle," he answered with a great gulp, and nearly choking himself with a huge mouthful of bread. By degrees,

however, he regained his composure, and was more at ease than on his visit to the manor house. His words were not so stilted and his manner was infinitely more natural.

After lunch the young people departed in quest of the shells that each new tide threw upon the beach; and Célestin was fortunate enough to secure some of a variety that was rarely found on that shore. They were those softly tinted bivalves which, while utterly without value in the eyes of naturalists, are highly esteemed by persons who wish to form them into those eccentric bouquets sometimes seen in curiosity shops.

“Ah ! what lovely little shells !” cried Mimi, as she received them in her basket. “One might make all sorts of flowers with them.”

“Yes,” said Irène ; “if I had enough I would try to do some large roses.”

“They would be very beautiful,” replied Célestin. He walked with them to the door of the manor house. As soon as Mademoiselle de Kerbsé-jean was alone with her uncle, she said to him with an air of girlish triumph :

“Well, uncle ! what do you think now ? It is clear that your young man is much pleased with Mimi. She was very sweet toward him too. It seems to me that things are going very smoothly, and that the marriage will come of itself !”

“It is quite probable,” answered the Chevalier ; “and if so I shall certainly be much pleased.”

Célestin came again to the manor at the end of two days, and this time made his entrée with more ease to himself and others. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean was alone with Mimi. He came in with his hat in both hands, and bowed without letting it fall, and slipped into the nearest chair, drawing a long breath of relief as he did so.

"You seem fatigued," said Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean, noticing that his face was red, as if he had been taking a long walk in the sun.

"I have been walking," he answered ; and, taking a handkerchief tied up at the four corners from his hat, he added : "I went to look for something that I promised Mademoiselle Mimi the other day."

"Promised me !" she cried. "What is it ? I do not remember anything. Let us see."

Célestin untied the handkerchief and spread out on the marble table a collection of shells of different colors and kinds.

"How exquisite !" exclaimed Irène. "Where did you find them ?"

"Beyond Roscoff, at the Ile de Bats. The shore is covered with them."

"Ah !" said Mimi with a bright blush ; "and you went all that way for me ?"

"And because mademoiselle said that she would like some of these shells to make roses of."

"But I should be very sorry to have you go so far merely to gratify my whim," cried Irène ;

“therefore I will leave to Mimi the burthen of the gratitude you merit.”

From that day the young man was often seen by the inhabitants of the manor. He came to the house always with some good excuse, or he was seen by Irène and Mimi when they went to walk with the Chevalier. This transient intercourse had upon him the happiest effect; his language became more natural and more correct, and his bearing less awkward. The Chevalier lent him books and gave him many useful hints; but the kind old gentleman met with many unlooked-for obstacles. Like most men in his position, Célestin disdained all that was written with the especial purpose of enlightening the profound ignorance of the people by imparting exact ideas in the most direct and simple fashion. He absolutely refused to open “*La Science populaire de Claudius*,” although he knew nothing of the work save its title. At the same time he eagerly took possession of some political works of which he could not comprehend one word; which fact, however, did not prevent him from quoting long sentences with imperturbable and amusing *aplomb*. His mind was naturally inclined to reverie and even mysticism. Historical works and travels did not interest him in the least. Books of poetry appealed to him more strongly, and he could have devoured an entire library of plays and novels.

All this time Irène’s plans seemed rapidly

drawing to a successful termination. Célestin seized every occasion to present himself at the manor ; and when every possible excuse was exhausted for going, and the ladies were prevented from going out by a succession of rainy days, he could be seen, through the rain and the mist, wandering disconsolately in the meadows. And at last, when the sun shone through the clouds again, and he came face to face with the Chevalier as he suddenly turned the corner of a hedge, and heard the fresh young voices utter kindly greetings, he would shiver and turn pale with emotion.

Mimi was the first perhaps to comprehend these symptoms, and this discovery developed within her hitherto unsuspected instincts of coquetry. She now affected fluttering ribbons and soft lace ; and her desire to please was shown in the time she spent before her mirror studying the effect of a rose-colored knot in her corsage, or amid the shining braids of her black hair. She encouraged Célestin in a thousand indescribable ways, and showed him very clearly that she took great pleasure in his society. These marks of preference, however, did not encourage the young man, as he accepted them timidly and replied only by the most discreet attentions.

Irène took the greatest pleasure in this little romance which was going on under her eyes, and looked forward to a happy dénouement with confidence and impatience. The poor child, how-

ever, knew nothing of love ; she had never opened one of the books of the present day which so clearly depict and dissect the passion, and she had no clear perception of what was going on in those two troubled hearts. Irène was almost a child in years, thoroughly artless and innocent in nature, and suspected nothing of the headlong enthusiasm, the joy, the despair, and the sadness of love.

This pretty pastoral lasted for some time, when all at once Mimi's mood changed. Suddenly, and without the smallest apparent motive, she became excessively cold in her manner toward Célestin, and even seemed annoyed by his presence. Under pretense of illness she refused to go out, and for several days did not even make her appearance in the salon. This conduct seemed to act as a spur to Célestin, who came daily to ask of Mimi's health, and appeared more astonished than irritated at her conduct.

This unexpected turn of affairs disconcerted Mademoiselle Kerbséjean, and one morning when alone with her uncle she said to him in a troubled sort of way :

"I can not understand what Mimi has got into her head. She is like what she was when we first knew her. She stays in her room, and will not open her lips to any one. One who did not know her would think her in great grief ; but of course we know that this is not so. But something has hap-

pened, something is going on in her mind, which I can not get at ; nor can Madame Gervais, who has questioned her more closely than I would dare to do."

"My dear child," answered the Chevalier, gravely, "I am afraid that you are responsible for this, and that you have imprudently spoken to her of this matrimonial project."

"Never, uncle, never !" Irène answered eagerly. "Of course I could not mention it until Célestin made a formal proposal."

"A formal proposal !" exclaimed the Chevalier. "I do not believe that he even thinks of doing so. He has had ample opportunity to broach the subject to me, but has never approached it."

"And yet it is easy to see that he loves Mimi !"

"Well ! I don't know ; it is not altogether easy to judge of what is going on in the youth's mind. But, even were I sure that he was in love with Mimi, I should be by no means certain that he would wish to marry her. The very reasons which would always deter me from suggesting to any young man that he might ask for Mimi's hand, and with it a comfortable dowry, may affect Célestin as well. I have never made any allusion to Mimi's parentage, or told him of the circumstances attending her father's death. Every one, of course, knows it here, and he may have heard the story twenty times. All depends on the impression it may have made on him, which impres-

sion, I fear, has not been favorable to our plans. Magni must have talked by the hour together, and repeated to him all that old Cattel Piolot said ; and he has probably decided on his course. This, in my opinion, is the reason why he has made no application to me."

"I never thought of this," said Irène, sadly.

"Fortunately, there is no harm done," resumed the Chevalier.

"It is perhaps only timidity that prevents Célestin from speaking," continued the girl, adhering obstinately to her pet idea ; "and time will show."

The same day Magni appeared at the manor. She brought from Célestin a little basket of figs which he had got at Roscoff from that huge tree whose spreading branches are the wonder of the whole country. It was Mademoiselle de Kerb-séjean who received the old woman, who did not go away until she had talked for an hour about her master.

"He is a good boy," she said, "and certainly makes no ill use of his little fortune. He never puts his foot within the doors of a cabaret ; he walks all day, and in the evening he reads or writes. His only fault, in my opinion, is that he is too proud with poor people. He ought to remember that no member of his family ever wore silk, and that his grandmother's petticoat had as many pieces in it as there are days in the year."

"Which did not prevent her from being proud in her way, too," said Irène.

"Célestin honors her memory," continued Magni; "and, when I tell him how good the whole Kerbséjean family were to her, his gratitude passes all bounds."

"Poor Cattel!" said Irène. "She was an eccentric creature—rough externally, but at heart good and charitable. She showed this at the time she watched over the body of that unfortunate—"

"Oh yes," interrupted Magni; "I told that story to Célestin."

"Ah! And what did he say?"

"Not much. He was extremely astonished, however, when he heard how the little girl who lives under your roof got here. He would not believe me when I described her appearance and that of her father. But one day, when I was clearing away a lot of old boxes in an outhouse, what should I come across but a bundle of old clothes—the very ones the musician and his daughter had on their backs the day they came. Everything was there—the coat, the knee-breeches, the wig, and everything else. I called Célestin, thinking he would laugh; but no, indeed. As soon as his eyes fell on the rags, he looked much pained, and begged me to put them away carefully where no one would ever see them."

"My uncle is right, I fear," thought Irène.

The same day before dinner she went to Mimi's room.

"Well, well! naughty girl," she said, pleasantly, "do you never intend to be well again?"

"I am not ill," answered Mimi, tranquilly.

"Then why do you stay shut up here? Why do you not go out to walk with us?"

"I hate to walk," was the unexpected reply.

"But you do not hate to come down to the salon?" cried Irène in astonishment.

"Do you need me to wind your wools?" asked Mimi.

"No, Mimi, no! it was not that I wished to make use of you that I asked you that," replied Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean gently. "I want you in the salon because I want your society."

"I am perfectly well off here," replied Mimi, in a tone which indicated smoldering bitterness in her heart.

Irène said no more, but left the room. When she reached her own she found her mother's maid, now an old woman, waiting to aid her in dressing. This woman, as she brushed her young lady's hair, said:

"Mademoiselle Mimi does not deserve all your goodness. Do you know what she did this very day, and in my presence? She opened the window and tossed out those beautiful great roses which you took so much trouble to make out of those shells."

"She did that?" cried Irène aghast.

"I reproved her, mademoiselle," continued the maid, "but she told me that the shells were hers."

"That is true; Célestin Piolot gave them to her."

"That is no reason for pulling them to pieces, I am sure. Besides, what harm did Célestin Piolot ever do to her?"

"I do not know," murmured Irène; "but it is certain that she is angry with him for some reason."

All these reflections prevented Mademoiselle Kerbséjean from eating any dinner, and when night came from sleeping. Magni's words troubled her. She drew a forcible picture of Célestin with his love and his prejudices, and she prepared a long series of reasons to prove to him that Mimi was not unworthy of his affection nor of his hand, merely because she had danced in the public room of an inn, and her father had worn a ridiculous costume. Sleep overtook her finally, and she dreamed that they were celebrating this wedding by a dance in the old house where Célestin lived, and that in the midst of the festivity the shade of old Cattel appeared and drove away the mountebank's daughter with her distaff.

X.

THE next day, at the hour when the family from the manor usually went out for their walk, Célestin Piolot left his house and strolled slowly down to the shore. It was the last of September, and fleeting clouds had darkened the sky at intervals all the morning ; but at this moment a brilliant rainbow appeared dividing the clouds, which fled before a soft southeast wind, and the sun began to dry the grass. The young man followed the road that passed the manor, and went to the rocks where some months before he had lunched in such charming companionship.

This sweet recollection apparently filled his mind, for he seated himself again in the same place and drew an interlaced cipher on the sand with a light willow wand. Then, rising with an apparent effort, he turned back by the same path he had come, and noticed the black clouds that were once more gathering thick and fast in the sky. On going out that morning he had uttered an ardent prayer that the sun should show his radiant face in an azure sky ; now, returning from his solitary walk, he wished none the less ardently that the black clouds would open and pour down upon his devoted head ; but he could conjure neither storm nor fine weather to his aid, and when he was square in front of the manor the rain still

held off. Then, without the smallest excuse, and indeed without any reflection, he entered the gate. Generally there were people on the terrace and in the hall, but on the day of which we write there were none. When Célestin reached the ante-room he found there only a little heedless servant boy, who ran forward and threw open the door of the salon without speaking. The young man stood on the threshold, not knowing exactly what to do. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean was there and alone, in her usual seat before her embroidery frame, but not at work, for she had dropped her needle and held a book.

"Come in, Célestin," she said as she looked up.

"I disturb you, I fear," he said, with a glance around the room.

"Not at all," she said gayly, pointing to a low chair close by her frame. "Sit here."

He obeyed, hardly daring to breathe. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean smiled slightly on seeing his evident discomfort.

"What has gone wrong?" she said. "You seem annoyed."

"I ! not at all, mademoiselle," he answered, in a constrained voice.

"Poor Mimi," added Irène, "has not come down stairs to-day. She is still not quite well."

"Ah ! so much the worse. I am sorry, very sorry," stammered Célestin.

Then came a long and formidable silence. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean thought this a most excellent occasion for an explanation ; but she had not the smallest idea of how to approach this delicate question. How could she do it without showing her own embarrassment ? With these thoughts in her mind she sat with her eyes artlessly riveted on Célestin's face, trying to read there something of his own thoughts and the mood he was in. Under these sweet eyes the young man shrank, and at last, hiding his face in his hands, he murmured a few unintelligible words.

"What has gone wrong ?" asked Irène once more ; "what troubles you ?"

"Prejudices ! prejudices !" he cried, lifting his eyes upward with a look of despair.

This isolated word naturally led to an explanation, and Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean said, with a quaint sincerity of belief that was absolutely delicious : "Only weak minds indulge in prejudices ; such chimeras never affect enlightened intellects."

"Mademoiselle ! can I believe that it is you who speak ?" cried Célestin.

"I ? Certainly, and why not ?" she answered quietly. "I only say what I think. Do you suppose, for example, that I despise Mimi because she is the daughter of a poor man who earned his bread by playing a guitar and singing in the streets ? No, no—by no means. It would be a great in-

justice to measure the esteem and affection we should show people by the good or bad fortune of their parents. Am I wrong, Célestin? And do you not feel as I do?"

"Oh yes," he answered, pressing his hand to his breast as if he felt a strange oppression. "Yes, I think I understand you; but I feel that I can not realize my present happiness!"

"Come, come!" said Irène, touched by the feeling and agitation shown by the young man; "try and be composed."

"But the joy is too intense. Would that I could die now at this very moment."

"Is it possible," thought Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean, "that people in love think and feel in this way?"

The young man drew his chair a little nearer to her side, and continued without looking at her:

"You have divined my secret," he said; "but you have not divined—you can never divine—the wild passion that pulses through my veins! No, you can never know what a love like mine is. It has given me much happiness, and tortures from which I have only escaped with life. Here," he added, drawing from his breast the corner of a checked handkerchief—"here is the fichu you made for my poor grandmother. For three months I have worn it on my heart as a relic."

Irène began to understand by this time, and sat in silent consternation.

"Behold me at your feet!" he cried in increasing excitement; "my life, my soul I consecrate to you, mademoiselle. Irène, I love you!"

"You!" exclaimed the haughty Brétonne with an indescribable air of disdain and cold scorn; and without another word she pointed to the door with an imperious gesture.

Célestin turned absolutely livid, and rose with trembling limbs. In his face was a look of such despair, and almost of indignant rage, that Mademoiselle Kerbséjean instinctively shrank behind the embroidery frame.

"Have no fear," he said in a dull, low voice; "I am going. Ah me! everything is at an end!"

And with these words he dashed from the salon and from the house itself.

A moment later Madame Gervais entered.

"What is it?" she said. "I have just met Célestin Piolot going down the avenue without a hat and looking almost like a madman. He flashed by me like lightning. What have you been saying to him, Irène?"

Instead of answering, Irène buried her face in her arms, which were crossed on her embroidery frame, and burst into a passion of tears—tears of shame and mortification.

The governess went to her, and, putting her arms around her, said in a tone of intense anxiety:

"What is it, my dear child? What has happened?"

"That I can never have courage to tell you," answered the girl. Then, burying her face again on Madame Gervais's shoulder, she cried until she could cry no more. When she was able, she told her governess all that had taken place, in a voice broken by incoherent exclamations of indignation and intense mortification.

The wise governess took care not to increase the disturbance in the girl's mind by attaching too much importance to her narration ; she heard the story in silence, and then said, with a little shrug of the shoulders :

"Well, well ! he is certainly a most foolish boy, and it was a most ridiculous scene. But, dear child, why do you reproach yourself in this way ? You are not to blame. You have done rightly, and could not foresee such insanity. But it is all over now. The impertinent boy will never show his face here again ; and he will also avoid meeting you elsewhere. As I am sure you will be freed from his presence, it will not be necessary, I think, to trouble your uncle."

This way of looking at the affair suddenly calmed Irène, as it relieved her mind of various scruples which haunted her.

"Alas !" she said, "who would ever have anticipated such an absurdity ?"

"Neither you nor I, be assured of that," answered Madame Gervais ; "but Mimi, I think, has been clearer-sighted."

“You are right, my good friend,” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean, struck by this observation ; “and this is the reason why she is so angry with this young man, and why she threw my roses from the window. She loves him then !”

“She is so capricious, so indifferent, my dear Irène, that she will soon cease to think of him ; and in the mean time take my advice and avoid all explanations with Mimi, and let the whole affair fade out of your own mind.”

Irène kissed her governess tenderly, and, after a moment or two of silent thought, said with her ingenuous eyes fixed on those of Madame Gervais :

“I can not understand. Tell me, what is love ?”

“What a question !” exclaimed that lady, somewhat embarrassed to reply to such a comprehensive inquiry. “You will understand for yourself one of these days. Wait until that hour comes.”

“But Mimi is older than I,” answered Irène persistently. Madame Gervais went to the window and looked out, and then returning to her pupil said :

“Come, sweetheart, let us take a walk in the garden. Your eyes are red, your cheeks are burning, and you must look like yourself before your uncle comes in.”

"He will not come yet awhile," answered Irène, with a glance at the clock.

"No, not yet. When he goes over the estate with the superintendent, it is always late when he comes in. The air is delicious—let us take your paint-box and album, and pass the remainder of the afternoon in the garden."

Just in front of the greenhouse was one of these flower-beds divided into symmetrical compartments which the French call a *parterre*. The box borders, at least a hundred years old, striped the yellow soil with bronze-green lines, between which stood stately hollyhocks, odorless dahlias, and superb chrysanthemums of all shades and colors. The most delicate plants, which could not endure the fogs of the sea-coast, were in glass houses—geraniums, and heliotropes, and orange trees. A fountain surrounded by rockwork threw its waters into a basin filled with lilies. Irène walked through these paths, and gathered a bunch of tea-roses, with their shining leaves of tender browns and greens, and then took her seat before a table just within the open door of the conservatory. On this table Madame Gervais had already placed the painting materials.

"There is that empty page," said the governess, opening the sketch-book.

"There are many empty pages there," answered the young girl. "I have been very indolent lately, and mean now to be very diligent and

make up for lost time ; for you know, my good friend, that I must fill it before my father returns, which may be in two months now."

"Not before New Year's, I am sure," said Madame Gervais.

"I hope so, indeed," answered her pupil with a sign ; "for the nearer the time comes, the more difficult it seems to me to wait."

Two hours later the Chevalier came in.

"Good morning, my queen !" he said to his niece as she ran gayly to meet him. "The weather has turned out superb after all, and I have regretted all day that I did not take you with me."

"And I have had ten minds to go after you," she answered with a kiss.

"What have you been doing all day ?" he asked tenderly.

"I have painted a tea-rose which bloomed this year for the first time."

"Show it me."

"No, not yet," cried Irène, preventing her uncle from going to the table ; "it is not quite finished. Go into the house, and I will follow you in a few minutes, as soon as I have picked up my brushes and paints."

The Chevalier with Madame Gervais went to the salon.

"What is that ?" said the Chevalier, seeing a letter on the table sealed and addressed to Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean.

He rang to ask who had brought this note. The servant said a boy from the village.

"Let us look at it together," said the governess, seized with a vague anxiety.

"Do you know the writing?" asked the Chevalier in astonishment.

She shook her head.

"I take it on myself at all events to break the seal," he exclaimed, doing so as he spoke. He hastily ran his eyes down the page, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and read it aloud.

"**MADemoiselle :** After the insult I received, my sense of dignity of course forbids me to reappear in your presence. I am going to leave Brittany, but I know not whither I shall go. If some day you hear that a miserable man has put an end to his existence, remember my last words, which will be again breathed in the last sigh of your devoted
CÉLESTIN PILOT."

During the reading of these last words, the wise and prudent Madame Gervais had not the least idea what she should say, but finally concluded not to tell the truth to the Chevalier, who was frowning over the word "devoted," which he seemed to regard as not sufficiently respectful.

"What does this all mean?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders. "How could my niece have insulted this boy?"

"She has not insulted him," answered Madame Gervais ; "she treated him simply as he deserved, that is all. This afternoon he came in, as he sometimes does, you know. Irène had a sort of explanation with him, and she saw that he had no desire for the marriage which she has so much at heart ; and thereupon she made up her mind that he should understand that his visits must cease."

"She did so too abruptly, I fear," observed the Chevalier. "I am astonished that Irène had not more tact."

"Possibly she was wounded by something this youth said," replied Madame Gervais ; "he may have openly disdained poor Mimi."

"The idiot is quite capable of just such folly," said the Chevalier ; "but I do not understand why he should assume these desperate airs !"

"Nor I," said Madame Gervais, shrugging her shoulders.

"It is not worth while to let Irène see this letter," added the Chevalier.

"I agree with you entirely," said the governess with considerable eagerness. "She has nothing to do, of course, with Célestin Piolot's sentiments and regrets."

Irène came in at that moment, and the subject was dropped. All now seemed at an end ; but in the evening Magni arrived, bearing some volumes borrowed from the Chevalier's library.

Célestin sent them with an apology for not bringing them himself. The old woman was in the antechamber, and Madame Gervais heard her say : “I must get back quickly, for Célestin came in to-day with a face that positively frightened me. He sat down to write, and began at least twenty letters before he finished one to his liking. At last he went out, and came back almost immediately with the same disturbed face. I think he must be very ill.”

Célestin Piolot went out of the manor with the firm intention of leaving his home the next morning ; but such a decided step was far beyond his strength. A fatal attraction retained him near the spot where Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean resided. It seemed to him that the happiness of seeing her occasionally, even afar off, would compensate him for the sad humiliation, the bitterness of his position. After vainly struggling with his unfortunate passion, he ended by abandoning himself to it entirely. The poor fellow roamed by day and by night around the manor like a crazy creature. Notwithstanding the severe autumnal storms, so long and so severe on this coast, he would take a book in his hand and repair to the wooded height overlooking the shore, from which he could see the entire extent of the large gardens belonging to the manor-house. He remained there sometimes until it was dark, seated on the trunk of a tree, with his feet on the wet

moss, watching every sign of life in the Kerbsé-jean dwelling. The most insignificant circumstance quickened the beating of his heart. A form passing a window, the rooms lighted one after the other, a curtain drawn by an invisible hand, would cause him to turn deadly pale.

More than once the coast-guard saw him wandering on the shore ; but they were content to watch him at a distance, although they had no idea of the reason of his nocturnal promenades. Had they looked at him more closely, they would have seen that he walked with an irregular vacillating step, with his eyes fixed on the light which burned behind the white-curtained windows of Irène's sleeping-room. The good people of P—— had various opinions in regard to his conduct : some of them declared that Célestin had lost his mind ; but the greater number, remembering the instincts of the Piolot family, were convinced that he had some smuggling project in hand.

Meanwhile this dismal lover became so bold that he went nearer and nearer to the manor ; and one dark and rainy night he sat for several hours on the threshold of that door which would never again open for him. Once even he dared to scale the wall, entered the garden, and spent the night in the greenhouse, not leaving it until daybreak. He carried away with him the tea-rose and a few sprigs of mignonette which had been withering

for several days on the little table where Irène painted.

The next morning, when the Chevalier saw his niece, he said :

“Good morning, sweetheart ; how did you sleep last night ? Badly enough, I suspect, for the dogs made a most hideous noise.”

“Yes, uncle,” she answered, as she kissed him affectionately, “they really terrified me. Pyramus barked so furiously for an hour and more in the court that I fancied he smelled robbers outside.”

“The walls are thick and the doors solid, and I think we should be perfectly safe even if there were a small army of them in front of the house ; nevertheless, I was twenty times on the point of rising to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.”

Mimi, who was present, now spoke.

“It is not the first time,” she said, approaching the window where Irène and her uncle stood talking, “that this has happened ; for the other night the dogs were perfectly furious, and I got up and looked through my blinds to see if there was no one visible. There was a faint moonlight, and I saw distinctly the figure of a man under the lindens—under that third linden on this side.”

“A man ! a stranger !” cried the Chevalier and Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean both at once.

“He did not look like a stranger. I think it was Célestin Piolot,” answered Mimi, coldly.

Irène raised her head quickly, and fixed her

eyes on Mimi with an anxious look, while the Chevalier turned away with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

“Célestin ! Nonsense ! What would he be doing there in the middle of the night ?”

“Just what he does all day long, I fancy,” answered Mimi abruptly. “Have you not seen him a hundred times walking up and down the highway in front of the manor gate, with his nose in the air and his hands in his pockets, looking like the simpleton he is ?”

“No, indeed,” said the Chevalier ; “I have seen nothing of the kind. But, even if I had, that would be no reason why I should believe that he would be roaming about our grounds at this season of the year and at these untimely hours. No, no, Mimi ; you must be mistaken.”

“I am not, then,” she muttered, wounded and sulky ; and turning she left the salon.

Hardly had she gone when the gardener appeared at the door. He was a good old peasant with a square face and serious eyes, and a manner of the most utter imperturbability.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I beg your pardon for disturbing you before breakfast, but it was necessary for me to speak to you.”

“Come in, my good man, come in,” answered the Chevalier, putting his arm round Irène, who had drawn close to his side with some vague apprehension.

"Monsieur will not believe me, I dare say," began Pierre, "but I am certain of what I am going to say. Some one was walking about the parterre last night."

"Did you see him?" asked the Chevalier, with an incredulous air.

"No, I did not see him himself, but I saw the marks of his feet in the sand; and they were boots, real boots with heels. Since the Count went away there have been no footmarks like those in the garden. I beg your pardon, sir, but you know you don't wear the kind of heels that young men wear. This person, whoever it was, went into the greenhouse—"

"And stole your green oranges?" interrupted the Chevalier.

"Oh no, sir; he took nothing. On the contrary, he left this behind him," said Pierre, drawing from his pocket a small diary, which was somewhat dirty and impregnated with a combined odor of aromatic herbs and tobacco. The Chevalier opened the diary, and read from the first page the following lines:

"Ere I touch the match to my funeral pyre,
I sing thy praise to my broken lyre—
O winged angel!"

"What stuff!" interrupted Irène, covered with confusion at the conviction that her name would certainly appear in these ridiculous rhymes.

““O winged angel !”” repeated the Chevalier, laughing ; “I hope he has carried his verse to a successful conclusion !” And the old gentleman read the remainder of the lines to himself, and then turned over the leaves, which were covered with interjections and isolated phrases. At last he said gravely : “It is not worth while to waste our time over this ill-spelled farrago of nonsense. Evidently Célestin Piolot is the writer ; I know his hand.”

“Why, where could you have seen it ?” asked Irène in great surprise.

The Chevalier bit his lip and went on :

“Was there ever anything so utterly absurd as this fellow ! Of course it was not to steal a bouquet that he entered the conservatory, but what on earth was his motive ? I must take measures to find out.”

“And why, pray ?” said Irène eagerly. “I think that it would be far better to ignore the whole thing. Of course it will never occur again.”

“At all events,” resumed the Chevalier, “we will in future let Pyramus loose every night ; and, when he is in the garden, no one, I fancy, will venture within the walls. Do you hear, Pierre ?” he said, turning to the old gardener.

“Yes, sir. I hear and I understand ; and to-night I will let the dogs out, and will be on the watch myself. If little Célestin climbs over the

wall again, he will run the risk of being shot through the body."

"Good Heavens, Pierre ! don't do such a thing," cried Irène ; "you might kill him."

"Don't be troubled, mademoiselle," he answered solemnly. "I will load my gun with salt."

"Very well ; you can go now," said the Chevalier, as he opened his newspaper ; "and remember that you are to say nothing to any one." Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean went to find her governess, and told her hurriedly all that had happened.

"Ah ! dear friend," she murmured as she concluded, "I have been in such a troubled state of mind. When Mimi mentioned Célestin Piolot's name I trembled from head to foot ; and while my uncle was reading that foolish little diary of his I felt absolutely as if I should go through the floor. I shall never dare to go near or to look out of a window again, without the fear of seeing that long pale face. Good Heaven ! what a bore it all is !"

"Calm yourself, my love," said Madame Gervais, drawing Irène into her lap and kissing her tenderly. "There is no necessity for your working yourself up this way. If this young man has a mania for writing ridiculous verses and strolling about at night, I really do not see what you have to do with it."

"I never wish to hear his name again," exclaimed Irène petulantly.

"You never shall from my lips," replied the governess quietly.

This most prudent woman already knew what Irène had come to tell her. Her watchful tenderness had discovered the same things attained by Mimi's jealous curiosity, and she was deciding on the best way to end Célestin's absurd romance when the gardener came with his tale to the Chevalier. This last exploit seemed so audacious and threatened so much future annoyance to her young charge, that the governess felt there was no time to lose. The evening of this day, therefore, when Mademoiselle Kerbséjean had retired to her room, Madame Gervais went back to the salon and took her place at the table, where she had intentionally left her work. The Chevalier was still reading at the corner of the fire.

"Well, Madame Gervais," he said as he laid down his book, "what do you think of the occurrences of last night? It is perfectly evident that Célestin Piolot is absurdly in love. I did not choose to say this in the presence of my niece, but I can say it to you. The thing is clear. Célestin climbs the wall and writes execrable verses, all for love of Mademoiselle Mimi."

"He is very foolish then," answered the governess quietly, "for she can't endure him."

"I am not so sure of that!" said the Cheva-

lier, raising his eyebrows. "But if this be so, it would be an act of kindness to the youth to tell him so before Pyramus eats him alive, or he breaks his neck by a fall from that high wall, or even takes a cold in his head out of love for this most ungrateful little creature."

"He will soon see that she cares nothing for him, and the whole affair will end," Madame Gervais answered with an air of indifference. After a few moments' silence she folded her work and went toward the fire.

"Have you noticed, sir," she said quietly, "how Irène has changed lately?"

"Yes, my dear Madame Gervais," he answered with a sigh, "I have indeed noticed it. She has lost her serenity as well as her gayety; a mere nothing irritates her; she is sad without any apparent reason. But, after all, is it not to be expected? Our child has departed; our baby is a woman!"

"She is sad because she is in a state of expectancy, which is always trying to the nerves. Her hope of seeing her father soon is marred by the dread of hearing each day that he is not coming. She counts the days now, and I tremble too lest the Count's arrival shall be deferred longer than we supposed."

"I do not expect him," replied the Chevalier, lowering his voice—"I do not expect him in the least. If he had meant to be here before New

Year's, he would have written to me to that effect by the last India mail steamer. I doubt if we shall see him before next spring."

"The delay will be intensely trying to Irène," said Madame Gervais thoughtfully. "The winter will seem endless to her if she finds that she must wait until spring for the happiness she believed to be so near at hand. Fortunately, at her age one is not absolutely inconsolable, and a very small distraction will dissipate a great grief. You can easily console Irène, sir."

"I understand you," he replied with a smile. "You are of the opinion, then, that it would be advisable not to wait any longer, but to make our long-talked-of journey at once. I was quietly coming to the same decision: This is Mademoiselle de Kersalion's last letter," he continued, opening a portfolio on the *escritoire* and taking out a letter; "she renews her invitation in the most pressing terms—so pressing that until I had fully decided to accept it I felt that it was best not to show to Irène what our good cousin said of her intense impatience to see the child. And Madame de Kersalion, who for thirty years has believed herself to be hovering between life and death, adds with her own hand that she can not die until she has pressed the heiress of the Kerbséjeans to her heart."

"Then let us go to Paris at once," cried Madame Gervais eagerly.

This exclamation from a person ordinarily so self-contained struck the Chevalier most forcibly. He looked at his companion inquiringly.

"Is it possible," he said, "that our poor Irène is growing tired of our simple monotonous life?"

"By no means," replied Madame Gervais gayly. "The young bird is still contented in its nest, but it longs to try its wings a little."

The preparations for the journey were quickly made, and so quietly that no one outside the house knew anything of them. Either by accident or design, Madame Gervais kept all the servants so busy that they had no chance to run down to the village and gossip; so that Magni herself, that ambulatory gazette, did not learn of the Kerbséjeans' departure for Paris until after they were gone.

On the eve of All Saints' Day Célestin Piolot went out as usual at noon, with a book under his arm, his broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and his overcoat buttoned to his chin. The sky was black with clouds, and a fine drizzling rain fell with dreary persistency. As the young man passed the manor-house he noticed with some little surprise that the blinds on the lower windows were all closed; but he had no idea of the real cause, and continued his way to the top of a small hill closely covered with trees, and stopped at a large rock, in the side of which was a small excavation overhung with ivy, wherein he was comparatively sheltered from the rain.

The weather grew worse and worse ; sudden gusts of rain and wind blew down showers of yellow leaves, and made the paths still more slippery. Célestin crept into his lair among the rocks, and sat there with his elbows on his knees. He could see the paths in the parterre marked by their rows of box, and on the left the glass houses which were filled with exotics ; but in a moment the rain dropped like a gray curtain between himself and this prospect, and Célestin endeavored in vain to discover if any living person was behind that transparent wall which sheltered the chilly orange-trees from the cold rain. Once or twice he fancied he saw a woman's form, and this illusion sufficed to make him happy for the whole day. After two or three hours he rose and took his way to the village, his heart beating with passion, but chilled to the marrow of his bones by the dampness.

As he reached the terrace he saw Magni coming down the steps, who when she caught sight of her young master ran to meet him, with the exclamation :

“I have a great piece of news for you ; do you know what I have just heard ? The Chevalier, Mademoiselle, and Madame Gervais went away this morning.”

“Ah !” said Célestin with a start, and standing still as if a thunder-clap had burst over his head.

"Yes ; they went a little after dawn in the carriage," continued Magni, "and are by this time on board the steamer. To-morrow, in spite of the bad weather, they will be at Havre, and the next day in Paris. Mimi told me all this ; she can be pleasant enough when she chooses, you see."

"Ah ! they left her behind them then ?" murmured Célestin without knowing what he said.

"Yes, she is under Perrine's care. You know Perrine, the old woman who used to be maid to the Countess," answered Magni. "Mimi likes it too, for now she is absolute mistress of the manor. She told me that she liked it, and that she was never tired of being alone. 'No,' she says, 'Dame Perrine never orders me about. I shall rise when I please, and go to bed just when I choose ; I shall read all day if the notion takes me ; I shall walk when and where I like ; and I shall wear my Sunday dresses every day.' Then she asked me how you were, in such a tone that I knew she was very anxious to hear about you, and that she likes you very much. What message shall I give her from you when I see her ?"

"Tell her that I am well—well enough," answered Célestin, with some little roughness ; and without another word he abruptly turned on his heel, retraced his steps, and spent the remainder of the day in his old haunt in the woods.

Magni was too much accustomed to his eccen-

tricities to conceive the least suspicion ; after she had made the tour of the village and communicated her startling intelligence, she returned home to prepare her master's dinner, and then awaited his coming with her usual patience. After it was entirely dark he appeared, looking like a shipwrecked person dashed on the beach by the last heavy wave. His clothes were thoroughly drenched ; his hat, shapeless and wet, was pulled over his eyes ; and his hair stuck to his pale face.

"Good heavens ! how you look !" cried Magni, who, having foreseen precisely this state of things, had wisely lighted a few sticks in the fireplace, the cheery blaze and sparkle of which filled the room with light and noise. "Do go and change your clothes at once, and then get warm before you eat anything. You look as if you were going to be ill."

"I am not cold," answered Célestin, laconically.

"Then eat your dinner, for it has been ready three hours."

"I am not hungry."

"Then you are sick, that is all ; and it is not in the least astonishing, considering the life you lead. I shall go and make you a hot tisane ; and, when you have swallowed it, I shall insist on your going to bed and covering yourself well up. You will soon be in a perspiration, and to-morrow all right."

"I have no time to go to bed," answered Célestin ; "it will take me all night to make my preparations for a journey. To-morrow morning I start."

"What on earth do you mean ?" cried Magni, aghast ; "and where are you going ?"

"To Paris."

"To Paris ? You too !" repeated the old woman, more and more astonished. "Do you think you shall see the Kerbséjeans ?"

"It is quite possible," answered Célestin, coldly.

"Well, well !" muttered Magni, "strange things happen nowadays. And what is to become of me ?"

"You will wait here quietly, and will take care of the house."

And without further delay he went to the old armoire, and thence to the antique chest of drawers, to find all his best clothes.

Magni looked on in silence for a few moments ; then, going toward him, she said :

"Listen, Célestin Piolot. I am only a poor woman hired by you ; but it is precisely because I eat your bread that I feel I ought to speak frankly to you, and as my conscience dictates. You are living a life that is ruining you in every way—your little fortune and yourself. I know very well that you are not dissipated, and that you never drink ; but I nevertheless believe that it would be far better for you to spend a little money

at the cabaret than to run from morning till night over the fields in this crazy sort of way. May I give you a little piece of advice? Well, then, remain here in your home, work at your trade, and find a wife before the end of the year."

Célestin Piolot shrugged his shoulders with a fierce burst of laughter.

"Marry! I marry? That is quite impossible."

"Impossible? And why, pray?" asked Magni. "There are plenty of good matches about here. A good-looking fellow like you, with a roof over his head and some shining gold pieces in a strong box at his notary's, won't have to ask twice for a wife, unless he should take it into his head to want to marry one of the daughters of the King of France, or perhaps a Kerbséjean!"

At these last words Célestin turned pale. He looked at Magni with a troubled air, as if to ask if she had discovered his secret; but the old woman, who had never dreamed of such an enormity, continued with a knowing wink:

"Other people have been young besides yourself, you know, and I know by experience how foolish girls can be. I know one this very minute who would give her eyes to keep you here."

"Who is that? Oh, that little Mimi?" said Célestin, with superb disdain. "I hope she is no such simpleton, and has no such ideas. If she has, she will have plenty of time to forget them while I am gone."

XI.

CÉLESTIN PILOT left the next morning at daybreak. His old housekeeper accompanied him a short distance, and, having at last bid him farewell, she hurried off to the manor, hoping to be the first to tell how her young master had also decided to take a little trip to Paris.

On hearing this bit of news, Mimi showed not the smallest surprise or excitement, but answered quietly : "He is very wise, for he finds it stupid here. *Bon voyage*, I say."

Nevertheless, when Magni had gone, she went down to the further end of the garden and there wept long and passionately. The few days which followed she was both sad and irritable ; but by degrees she consoled herself and tried to find amusement in doing precisely all those things which hitherto had been forbidden to her. She went out entirely alone and strolled about the woods and fields, and even went so far as to go out with some of the fishermen in their boats. On her return from these wild expeditions, she listened with a stolid countenance to good old Perrine's remonstrances ; and, as if to prove to the woman the utter uselessness of her interference, she did precisely the same things the next day. Once she went as far as Roscoff, and came home in a state of high delight because she had

seen a group of drunken sailors singing gay songs and reeling from tavern to tavern. Her old associations and instincts awakened at these sights and sounds, and she felt a vague restlessness and longing to resume the free and careless life she had led for so many years.

Meanwhile the wintry blast had borne away every leaf from the trees, and the sun showed itself at rarer intervals through the rain and the fog. Mimi could not continue her desultory excursions, and it came to pass that a week at a time elapsed without her being able to put her foot over the threshold.

At last one day she became utterly desperate, and in a moment of ennui determined to make an onslaught on the Chevalier's library. In a corner she found some volumes which had not seen the light for twenty years; they were romances of the last century—"Gonsalvo de Cordova," "Estelle," and several others of the same stamp. Mimi carried them off to her own room and read them eagerly. These fictions interested her intensely—not that she understood very much of the sentimental tenderness of Estelle's lover, nor of the chivalric sentiments of the heroic servant of Isabella the Catholic; but their extraordinary adventures, and the word love to be met with on every page, these portraits of young and charming cavaliers, fired her imagination and made her dream of a lover handsomer than Nemorin, braver

than Gaston de Foix, and more honorable and powerful than Gonsalvo de Cordova, the Great Captain. The remembrance of Célestin Piolot was nearly effaced by these noble forms ; Mimi thought of him with bitter disdain ; she thought of him as entirely beneath herself, with his ancestors the smugglers, and his talent for making locks, and his inheritance of twelve thousand francs.

Two months elapsed in this way, and the proprietors of the manor were now expected almost daily, when Nicolas, one of the servants that had gone to Paris with the family, suddenly appeared one morning charged with orders from the Chevalier and commissions from Mademoiselle de Kerb-séjean. The Chevalier stated that his absence would be prolonged until the end of the winter. Irène sent all her New Year's gifts in advance to every one, and wrote to Mimi a most kind and friendly letter. These few lines contained none of the gushing enthusiasm so common in the correspondence between two young girls, but the letter breathed intense happiness in every line—the happiness of a person who is enjoying life in a thousand new ways.

Mimi realized this in a vague sort of way, and said, with a sigh of regret not unmingled with envy, “ Ah ! How I should like to be in Paris myself ! Mademoiselle is very happy there—so happy that she does not once think of coming back ! ”

That evening, in the twilight, Nicolas related all his experiences and adventures. The good fellow was naturally loquacious, and he began eagerly to describe the multitude of new things that he had seen.

“When I think of the life people live there,” he said in his simple fashion, “I am filled with amazement. Animals and people never rest : the gentlemen pay visits all day and go to balls all night, so that the carriages are rolling about from one sun to another. But, thank Heaven, in Madame de Kersalion’s house they have no such habits, and it is almost as quiet there as here. The house is in the middle of a fine garden near the village of Neuilly. When I say village, don’t imagine that I mean two or three streets with miserable little houses and a square in front of the church. By no means. At Neuilly there are superb wide streets, and the king has a château there. Madame de Kersalion’s house is not so large as this one, but it is filled with the most beautiful furniture and silver and linen. I know all about it, for many is the time that I have helped the woman in charge. The rooms prepared for the Chevalier and mademoiselle are magnificent. I could not begin to tell you all the things on the chimneys and étagères. It took me two or three hours every day, I know, merely to dust them.

“When we first arrived there they had no

company, but after that people began to come in crowds. All the ladies whom my mistress the countess used to know came to call on her daughter as soon as they knew she was in Paris, and wished to show her all sorts of civilities. Every day heaps of invitations came, and my young lady has been to ever so many balls. She went at ten ; and I always went on the box with the coachman. I was allowed to stand in the hall, where I could see her go into the room with the Chevalier, and hear what people said when they saw her. My goodness ! You never heard any thing like it. There was just a buzz all round. We in the hall and antechamber could hear it, and it was glorious."

"What did they say ?" asked Mimi, who had seemed to be asleep in the corner of the fireplace.

"They said that mademoiselle was the most beautiful woman in France," answered Nicolas, "and I think they are quite right. People here did not think so, I suppose, only because they were in the habit of seeing her, and because too she never wore the beautiful toilettes that are so becoming to her."

"What sort of toilettes ?" asked Mimi again.

"I don't know how to describe them, I am sure. Her dresses are all covered with lace and flowers and pearls. Mademoiselle de Kersalion chooses them all, and then she dresses mademoiselle with her own hands. But I must not forget

to tell you that they have taken such a fancy to each other that they wish to live together always."

"It is very natural," said old Perrine. "My dear dead mistress was a Kersalion, you know, and the nearest relative of these people."

"I beg your pardon, Dame Perrine," interposed Nicolas. "You have forgotten the Duke de Renoyal."

"I know nothing about him," the good woman answered. "I can tell you all about the Kerbséjeans and their alliances, but I am not so *au fait* with the Kersalions."

"The Duke de Renoyal!" repeated Mimi. "Is he a great lord?"

This question seemed to Nicolas both stupid and impertinent. He shrugged his shoulders and went on.

"Madame de Kersalion calls the Duke her nephew, or Gaston oftener still. As she never goes out on account of her ill health, he comes to see her very often. I always run to the gate to see him as he comes sweeping down the road with his beautiful coach and outriders—his powdered coachman and footmen in livery. It is certain that even his Majesty the King has no more beautiful carriages than his."

Mimi at once pictured to herself a young man, haughty and elegant, surrounded by luxury and dressed like a prince in a fairy tale. The thought that in all probability he would marry Irène

crossed her mind, and, by a natural connection of ideas, she said suddenly :

“And Célestin Piolot ? Did you ever see anything of him in Paris ?”

“I came near forgetting to say a word about that scatterbrain,” exclaimed Nicolas. “I can’t imagine how he did it, but I assure you he was really everywhere. We never turned the corner of a street that we did not see him ; he was always darting in front of the carriage, and once we nearly drove over him. One day, when mademoiselle and my master came out of the Grand Opera, and I was looking for their carriage, I came face to face with him. He was gorgeous to behold—in a white vest, yellow gloves and with a beautiful gold pin stuck in his tie. I said ‘good evening,’ but he did not choose to see me. The next day I saw him again. Our people had gone to Notre Dame, and I was on the box with the coachman holding an umbrella, because it was raining hard. Suddenly I looked round, and there was Célestin Piolot following the carriage with his hat pulled away down over his nose ; and, when we got to Notre Dame, there he was again ; he had apparently found some short cut.”

“He must have been rather muddy !” said Mimi contemptuously.

The next day, toward night—it was Christmas Eve—Dame Perrine herself laid the table in the room where the servants took their meals and

spent their evenings during the winter. The sun had gone down amid clouds, and the flecking flames cast a wavering glow on the ceiling. Pierre, the old gardener, brought an armful of wood, which he threw into the chimney ; then, turning round, he said :

“ I have no heart to be gay this evening, for never before did we burn the Yule-log in the absence of the masters.”

“ No, indeed, never,” said the good woman with a sigh. “ In former days there was always a great gala on Christmas Eve; and, in spite of all the sorrow this house has known since then, the salon has always been open and the long table laid in the dining-room. Even the year that the good God took to Himself the Countess and the two children, the collation was served just as usual, with lighted candles and flowers ; but it was sad to see the empty places, and poor little Mademoiselle Irène wept when her uncle handed her the cake and bade her cut it as usual.”

At this moment Mimi entered all in a shiver, and, curling herself in a deep chair in the corner of the fireplace, she said :

“ It is frightfully cold, Dame Perrine ! It is hailing and snowing both at once ! ”

Then, seeing the table laid with unusual care, the pyramids of fruit symmetrically arranged on the four corners, and the candlesticks ornamented with fringed paper, she added :

“Are we going to have a fine supper, then?”

“Yes, just as we have always done,” answered Perrine. “The Chevalier sent his orders; he tells us to make ourselves comfortable. To-night we have a fine collation, and to-morrow we shall have turkey. More than that, he bade me bring up from the cellar certain bottles of good old wine, in which to drink the health of the Kerbséjeans.”

Mimi folded her arms under her shawl, curled herself into the corner of the window-seat, and watched with melancholy eyes the deserted, desolate highway. All day long her mind had dwelt on Irène's gayeties as recited by Nicolas, and involuntarily she compared her lot with that of Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean. A vague feeling of envy and of intense humiliation filled her heart. She could no longer endure the monotony of her life, and felt a bitter impatience in addition to her sadness.

The old gardener placed the Yule-log on the fire, and Dame Perrine was arranging on the center of the table a five-storied Savoy cake, when suddenly Mimi, who seemed absorbed in melancholy reflections, started to her feet and threw open the window, exclaiming:

“Hark! hark! I hear a carriage, and it is surely coming this way!”

The noise of wheels came nearer and nearer, and through the gray shadows of the twilight the

twinkling light of the carriage lanterns was soon seen. Every one ran to the gate except Mimi, who stood on the threshold of the door. A post-chaise came up the avenue at full speed and drew up before the door.

"Monsieur le Comte !" cried the old waiting-maid, lifting her eyes and hands to heaven in astonishment.

The Count descended and shook hands with all his people, who crowded around him.

"But my daughter?" he said; "my uncle?"

"They are well," answered Perrine with tears of joy. "Here is Nicolas, who has just brought us news of them."

"Brought you news of them?" repeated the Count with evident anxiety and disturbance. "Why, where are they?"

"They did not expect you, sir," began Perrine—"they did not expect you before spring; and, as mademoiselle was very sad at the delay, the Chevalier took her to Paris."

"And it is all my fault!" exclaimed the Count; "I ought to have written."

At this moment he caught sight of Mimi, who came toward him with a low courtesy.

"Mademoiselle, I have the honor of wishing you a very good evening," he said, lifting his cap with evident astonishment.

"You do not know me, sir," answered the young girl with a merry laugh; "I am Mimi."

"Is it possible?" he cried. "How you have grown and improved, my child! It is absolutely miraculous!"

"Come in," she answered; "come in quick and warm yourself."

They entered the lower room, and the Count placed himself in the corner of the chimney with Mimi, while Perrine opened the rooms and lighted fires all over the house.

"Ah! I am not sorry to be at home once more," he said as he threw off his fur cloak and fur-lined boots. "Do you know, little one, that I nearly died of cold on this road in spite of all my precautions?"

"You must be fearfully tired too," she replied, as she assisted him in unwinding the long cashmere scarf rolled around his neck. "How many thousand leagues have you traveled?"

"I came by the shortest road, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean; it is a matter of five or six weeks. When I reached Marseilles, and found that it was within the limits of possibility that I could reach home for Christmas, I threw myself into a post-chaise and traveled night and day. How on earth could I suppose that I should find no one here? I wanted to surprise them, and I have been surprised myself with a vengeance. It is a great pity. To-morrow I will rest, and the next day I will start off to Paris."

"As soon as that?" said Mimi in a tone of

sincere regret. "Would it not be better that mademoiselle and your uncle should come here to you?"

"Perhaps it would," said the Count, looking around. "I am so glad to be here, and I should much prefer to have them at home. But the weather is so severe that I dare not have my uncle travel at his age; and my daughter is not robust, although perfectly well."

"But the Chevalier is perfectly well too," answered Mimi; "he grows younger every day."

"So much the better—so much the better. But no one will say the same of me!"

"Nevertheless, it would be true if they did," said Mimi, turning her magnificent eyes full upon him.

The girl's words were entirely sincere, and to a certain point perfectly true. The Count had changed, but not to his disadvantage. The climate of India had softened the too vivid color of his complexion; his face was thinner, while the obesity which had threatened to overtake him had disappeared; his figure was as slender now as that of a youth, and was really very elegant. Unfortunately, in other respects he had not improved, for in these four years Time had traced many deep wrinkles on his brow and almost whitened his brown hair.

"Your figure is very youthful," resumed Mimi, looking at him from head to foot; "you are like

the Chevalier. When we see his back, so straight and slim, we would take him to be not more than twenty."

At this moment Perrine came in.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "for leaving you, sir, before I had made you comfortable here; but I am compelled to keep my eye on the servants. They do not know what they are doing, they are so perfectly delighted. And it is indeed a happiness to see you again, particularly at this season. Thank Heaven, the dining-room will not be dark, and cold, and closed to-night, after all. Nicolas is laying the table, and Pierre has put a Yule-log in that fireplace now, as well as down here. I shall have a respectable supper for you, sir, and things will soon go as smoothly as if we had known you were coming. Only one thing is lacking, and that is the presence of Mademoiselle and the Chevalier."

"As it can't be helped," said the Count philosophically, as he lighted his cigar, "we won't say any more about it."

"Supper will not be ready for nearly an hour, sir," added Perrine; "would you not like to take a biscuit and a glass of wine, or some fruit, perhaps?"

"No, thank you, Perrine," he answered. "I want nothing now; only be careful to see that the Bordeaux is well warmed, for this is cold weather."

"I will bring it up from the cellar this moment," she said, taking her bunch of keys.

Although Monsieur de Kerbséjean loved his daughter very dearly, he had already recovered from his disappointment at not seeing her on his arrival, and, his naturally good temper having gained the ascendancy, he now began to talk with Mimi. The girl gave him an accurate and amusing account of all that had taken place in the neighborhood during his absence. She had a certain spirited, droll way of talking that much diverted the traveler, and she laughed until the tears came while telling him how Célestin Piolot had looked over his grandmother's possessions, and the strange things he had discovered in that mysterious spot where the old woman hid away, by the side of her louis d'or, the dilapidated garments of three or four generations.

"And now, Monsieur le Comte," she said, as she concluded her recital, "it is your turn to tell me something of your travels. You must have seen most extraordinary things."

"By no means," he answered. "One always supposes that strange countries are full of wonders ; but, upon my word, I have seen nothing of the kind."

"Then people who write travels tell a great many falsehoods !" cried Mimi. "The Chevalier has read us the most marvelous accounts, and told us many curious things. I remember he said

that at Bombay the women wore bracelets on their ankles and gold rings in their noses."

"That is quite true," he replied, laughing; "and I brought some of this queer jewelry home. I will show it to you."

A moment later Nicolas announced that supper was served. Perrine said with a triumphant air: "I think my master will be satisfied."

The atmosphere of the dining-room was warm and perfumed. The old gardener had had time to cut some flowers from the green-house. The candelabras were a blaze of light, and the Yule-log crackled in the chimney.

"It is delightful here, with one's back to the fire and one's face to the table," said the Count as he seated himself. "But I can not sup alone. Come, Mimi, draw up your chair and sit there opposite me."

"Yes, sir," she said, coloring high with joy and pride, for this was the first time she had sat at the master's table.

The servants looked on in astonishment, and old Perrine was in a state of suppressed fury.

A sojourn of several years in the English colonies had not caused Monsieur de Kerbséjean to forget certain of his old habits. He had, on the contrary, acquired the custom of sitting long over his wine. His brain was rarely affected by his libations; he drank deeply, but after several hours at table showed no other effects than a little more

animation. This Christmas Eve he ordered up various rare old wines, and, when he had carefully ascertained the improvement made in them by the lapse of the last four years, he was in a very lively state of mind. The Christmas supper was prolonged until midnight. Then the Count filled his glass anew, and raising it high above his head, cried out :

“To your good health, fair Mimi !”

“To your happy arrival, Sir Count,” she answered, gayly. “Ah ! how delightful it has been for me that you came to-night ! and how much amused I have been !”

“It is now time for me to retire,” he said, pushing back his chair. “Good night, Mimi. Let me see your eyes to-morrow as bright as they are to-night.”

Fifteen minutes later the young girl was slowly taking down her hair in front of her mirror, and through her open door she was holding a conversation with Perrine, who slept in the next room. The good woman had by no means recovered from the shock of seeing Mimi Tirelon seated at the table opposite a Kerbséjean, and a certain sharpness was apparent in her words and voice.

“What a misfortune !” she said—“what a misfortune it was for Monsieur to arrive so unexpectedly ! Had he written, his family would have been here to receive him, and he would not have been reduced to your companionship.”

"Don't be troubled," answered Mimi, coolly ; "he has not been in the least annoyed."

"He means to go away the day after to-morrow," continued Perrine, "and of course he will spend the rest of the winter with his family in Paris."

"The Count said nothing of the time to me," said Mimi hastily.

"That may be, but you will see. When he once gets there, he will decide to remain, you may be very sure."

"If Mademoiselle and the Chevalier knew that he was here, they would return at once," said Mimi, thoughtfully.

"Certainly," answered Perrine ; "but they know nothing about it, you see, and the Count will walk in and surprise them. How happy his daughter will be !"

"And it is the day after to-morrow, then, that he means to go?" said Mimi. "If it should be very cold, however, he would not move, I am sure."

"Very possibly ; but, in the mean time, say your prayers and go to bed. Good night," added Perrine, putting out her light.

Mimi crossed her room, and lifting the curtains looked out of the window.

"What glorious weather for traveling !" she exclaimed with a shiver. "Although it is Christmas time, I see a cloud of white butterflies in the air. Do you hear, Perrine ?"

"If the snow melts as it falls, it will not amount to anything," said the old woman, sententially.

"But it does not melt," cried Mimi. "Tomorrow you will see a lovely sight ; the ground will be all white, and everything will be frozen stiff. Good evening and good night."

She shut the door of her room, but, instead of going to her bed, she seated herself at a small table, in the drawer of which was a hodge-podge of old pens, an almost empty inkstand, and some few sheets of paper blotted and tumbled. She selected the best among them, and began a letter to Mademoiselle Kerbséjean, announcing the arrival of the Count. When her letter was written, she sealed and addressed it in a most legible hand, then looking at the letter, the first she had ever written in her life, she murmured in a tone of intense satisfaction : "If it is very cold, the Count will not start ; and, before he can go, in all probability the others will be here !"

XII.

THE next day, on rising, Monsieur de Kerbséjean saw through the windows the sky hung dark with clouds ; the country was all white with snow, the waves beat wildly against the rocks, and the sea was lashed to fury by the wind. The

Count shivered as he surveyed this melancholy picture, and turning away he established himself in one of those luxurious chairs which are nearly as soft and capacious as a bed, and vowed that he would not move from the fire again that whole day. When breakfast was served, Mimi appeared ; she came from church fresh and radiant, and determined to please. She had never dreamed of fascinating this man of forty-five ; but his flattery and evident admiration had excited her, and she had a strong desire that he should continue to think her beautiful. Perhaps she already saw, as through a glass darkly, the vague possibility of gaining an influence over him, and of obtaining in that way certain things which she desired. When she appeared, Monsieur de Kerbséjean exclaimed with a beaming countenance :

“Good morning, Mimi. You have come just in time to breakfast with me ; but first come and warm yourself a little, and tell me what sort of a day it is outside.”

“It is horrible weather,” she answered as she took off her merino cloak and her little black straw bonnet. “I am afraid my fingers are frost-bitten in spite of my woolen gloves. Just look here.”

As she said this, she extended her slender dimpled hands, and showed him the rosy tips of her fingers.

“Poor little soul !” said the Count, jokingly.

"It is like Russia. Your hands are frozen, and how is your nose?"

"My nose is all right, I fancy," answered the girl with a merry little laugh, showing a double row of perfect teeth which looked like pearls.

"So much the better," returned the Count in the same tone; "but we can't be sure of the safety of that important feature if this cold weather should continue; so to guard against any such misfortune I am going to give you something to protect it."

And he went at once to look among his trunks for a silk scarf, which he himself put around Mimi's neck.

"Thanks, sir," she said in childish delight. "Ah! how beautiful it is, and how soft and shining."

She ran to a mirror and admired the effect of this gayly-striped fabric; then she took it from her neck and twisted it into a turban round her head.

"Look, Sir Count," she cried, turning around; "am I not pretty?"

"No—you are beautiful!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically.

She was indeed marvelously beautiful. With instinctive coquetry she raised her arms, and threw back her slender graceful form as if to catch the floating ends of the scarf; and at that moment, in her attitude and expression, there was some-

thing that recalled the bold beauty of her mother the Bohemienne.

Almost at the same moment Dame Perrine entered.

"Has not Nicolas told Monsieur le Comte that breakfast was on the table?" she asked in a severe tone, looking at Mimi with disapproving eyes, and signing to her at the same moment to remove the fantastic coiffure that she was again carefully arranging at the mirror; but the young girl cared not a sou for this silent hint, and without even looking round she said calmly:

"Look at me, Dame Perrine; don't I make a fine sultana?"

"Come on, silly one!" exclaimed the Count, rising. "You heard, did you not, that breakfast is on the table?"

Mimi tossed her scarf on the back of a chair, smoothed her hair with another glance at the mirror, and said triumphantly as she passed in front of Perrine:

"Monsieur le Comte is very good to me. He wishes me to cheer his loneliness; he has given me this scarf, and I love him with all my heart."

All the following day the country lay wrapped in its winding sheet of snow; the cold was intense, and the Count, enjoying the luxuriously warm apartments of the manor, never once thought of the journey of which he had spoken. He, of course, would have been sadly wearied had only

the honest face of Nicolas and the wrinkled countenance of Dame Perrine met his eyes ; but Mimi was so gay that he did not for a moment find the day too long.

Precisely the same affinities attracted him now as always. A cleverer or more refined person than Mimi would not have pleased him half as well ; this little girl assailed the lower side of his nature, and he enjoyed her society precisely in the same way that he had formerly enjoyed the society of the frequenters of the *Café de Neptune*. The girl, proud of her success, assumed all the airs of a spoiled child, and seemed to expand in the genial atmosphere of the Count's familiar kindness. She fluttered around him, teased and cajoled him from morning to night, with not one thought save the fleeting amusement of the hour. She insisted on Monsieur Kerbséjean showing her all the curiosities he had brought home with him, and together they opened a huge case packed with odorous fabrics of strange Eastern designs and colors. The things had been collected without any especial discernment, and formed a strange medley which delighted Mimi's soul for one whole morning. The Count having bidden her select what pleased her best, she took the silk for a dress (a deep rose-color embroidered in silver), a flagon of oil of sandalwood, a round fan made of peacock's feathers, and a pair of wide bracelets of scarlet lacquer spangled with gold ; these things most attracted

her, and she cared not a straw for the cashmere shawl the Count gave her to wear instead of her merino cloak.

The favors thus showered on Mimi caused a flutter of astonishment among the servants in the house, and Dame Perrine was indignant as well as surprised. Respect closed her lips, but she expressed her mind most fully to her old comrade Pierre the gardener, and to the faithful Nicolas.

“Monsieur le Comte is too good,” she said to them, “altogether too good ; he encourages her in all her familiar ways, when in reality he ought to be very much offended with her. This wild creature is as disrespectful as possible all the time toward him. Good Heavens ! I just wish the Chevalier could hear her talk in this way ; he would set her down pretty hard, I tell you ! Ever since she has dined regularly with the Count her pride and arrogance are beyond belief. She won’t bear one word of reproof or remonstrance. I do not believe that Madame Gervais herself could manage her now. She has the most fantastic and extraordinary ideas in her head all the time. For example, she has taken a notion to sit up until all hours in her room after everybody is asleep in the house ; last night when I saw her light through the keyhole, I got up and looked to see what she was about ; and what do you think I saw ? Why she was cutting up that beautiful silk the Count gave her !”

“And she dared to put scissors to that?” groaned Nicolas.

“Yes, my dear child, that is just what she dared to do! She cut and slashed that beautiful satin right through the silver flowers—she who does not know how to cut out a kitchen apron even. But have patience; this cold weather will not last long. The Count will soon be off to Paris, and then it will come to an end.”

Two or three days later Mimi disappeared after dinner, and the Count took his coffee alone in the salon. Old Perrine went in with some excuse, and looked around the small table where Nicolas had placed the silver tray with liquors and all the necessary apparatus for smoking, not the vulgar cigar, not the bitter cigarette, but the long Turkish pipe.

While Monsieur de Kerbséjean, reclining in his arm-chair in the corner of the fire, drank his coffee and slowly smoked his hookah in indolent enjoyment, Dame Perrine came close to his chair, and rubbing her hands said:

“Are you not glad, sir, that the weather is changing? By to-morrow I think there will be a thaw.”

“I see no sign of it,” replied the Count. “I put my head out of the window just before dinner, and nearly lost my nose. The wind blows directly from the North, and I assure you that it was not a summer zephyr.”

"It is most unfortunate that this severe weather should come now, and keep you here like a prisoner," added Perrine.

"Yes, indeed," he muttered sleepily, from the depths of his chair.

"But," continued the good woman, "the roads are not so bad as was supposed. One of the coastguards was here this morning; he had just come from Morlaix, and said that beyond there the roads were perfectly good. Heaven grant that his account is correct, for you must be very impatient to see your daughter."

"I would give the world if she were here now!" answered the Count more energetically.

At this moment the door was suddenly thrown open. In came Mimi like a whirlwind, and went directly to the Count. She stood before him for a moment, and then slowly turned round and round to show him the entire effect of her costume.

"Good Heavens! What a masquerade!" exclaimed Perrine, throwing up her hands.

"Turn round once more, little one, that I may see you better," cried the Count. "And I thought that you would never know what to do with rose and silver silk! But, upon my word, you have contrived to make a most bewitching ball-dress out of it. It is wonderfully becoming to you."

And he was right. Her glowing, insolent beauty was fully displayed by an extremely low-

cut bodice ; her sleeves were a mere band with rose-colored floating ribbon ; her bracelets were pushed above her elbows after the fashion of a bayadère. To complete her costume, she had planted at the back of her head some of the peacock plumes from her fan, and to her belt she had fastened the chains of the enameled flagon. The whole effect, if bizarre, was none the less charming ; she suggested a princess from out one of the old romances of the days of chivalry, dropped from the clouds into this old château.

“How lovely she is !” said the Count, turning toward Perrine as if to ask her admiration ; but the old woman, restraining her indignation with the greatest difficulty, answered coldly :

“I should say that the costume is somewhat light for the season. Mademoiselle Mimi runs the risk of taking a violent cold !”

And the woman left the room as she uttered these words, with a sign to Nicolas to follow her.

“That is very true, little one,” said the Count ; “you must be freezing with your bare neck and uncovered arms,” and, turning to the fire, he stirred it up a little. “Come close to the chimney,” he added.

“Nonsense ! I am not afraid of the cold !” she answered ; and, as if to prove the truth of what she said, she took a fire-screen and used it as a fan. Presently she rose and glided to the center of the room, where she began to dance to

the air of a bolero, which she sang in a clear, ringing voice. The steps she improvised were not correct, and her movements had more of vigor than grace. This species of pantomime was a reminiscence of her childhood. The screen served as a tamborine ; she raised it above her head with a graceful curve of both arms, and bounded over the carpet with incredible fire and spirit.

Strangely enough, her own movements and voice awakened in her all her slumbering instincts and a thousand vague regrets ; she dreamed of the enthusiasm that she might produce in appearing on the stage before a crowded house, in her beautiful rose and silver robe and her diadem of plumes.

“Good ! very good !” cried the Count, beating time with his foot and emitting great clouds of smoke through his nostrils. “Upon my word,” he added, “I did not expect to have a ballet and pantomime to-night.”

“Ah ! It is rather fatiguing to dance and sing at the same time,” said Mimi, dropping exhausted into a chair.

“So I should suppose,” replied the Count. “You are utterly used up, little one !”

“Just see how my heart beats,” she said, bending toward him ; and taking his hand she placed it against the warm silk of her bodice.

“Indeed it does !” he answered, laughing heartily at her simplicity. “But you must not sit

there ; you are excessively heated and must not cool off too suddenly. You had best have some warm drink at once."

"Yes—I should like it," she said.

The Count did not ring ; but going to the table he put sugar, rum, and water into a cup, which he heated before the fire. When this punch was quite hot he handed it to Mimi, who drank every drop, and gave the cup back with the simple words, "It is good !"

"Now, little Mimi," said the Count, "let us have a game of dominoes ; it will rest you after your exercise."

"I am quite willing," the girl answered gayly.

The Count did not like any game which required profound thought, but dominoes pleased him. Besides, Mimi's way of playing amused him intensely. She laughed and clapped her hands joyously when she got a double six or double blank, and when she lost she was utterly wretched—wretched, too, in such a comical fashion that the Count shouted with laughter. This strange pair played dominoes the whole evening. When the clock struck twelve, Mimi rose, and, pushing aside the table, said with a profound courtesy :

"Sir Count, I wish you a happy New Year, followed by many others equally happy."

As she spoke she turned her pretty peachy cheek toward him for a kiss, which invitation he accepted most cordially.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "Is to-morrow the first day of the year? I had forgotten that."

"No, not to-morrow," answered Mimi, looking at the clock, "for 'to-morrow' is here. See, the New Year is one minute old."

"And I never thought of a gift for you," added the Count, feeling mechanically in his pockets.

"Oh! there is no hurry," replied Mimi, laughing; "I can wait a little longer."

"I have been here eight days, then," said Monsieur de Kerbséjean. "I never would have believed it; it seems to me absolutely impossible. Never did a week pass so quickly before."

"Have you not once looked at the almanac?"

"No, indeed, not once. Thanks to you, little sprite, I have been amused every moment of the time, and the days have passed like hours!"

On going to her room, Mimi stood silently before the mirror for some minutes, then slowly walked up and down the room, looking at herself all the time, utterly regardless of the observation of old Perrine, who could see her from her bed in the next room.

"Look here, Mimi," said Perrine at last, "it is really a great pity to see a girl of your age, brought up in a house like this, with so little manners and judgment. Monsieur le Comte, who is goodness itself, overlooks all your folly and im-

pertinence, and is even amused by them possibly ; but you have no idea of the trouble you are making for yourself. What on earth would the servants think of you if they had seen you to-night tricked out like an actress ? What would all the villagers say ? I tell you all this, my poor Mimi, out of kindness ; and you are doing very wrong to allow yourself to be carried away by your pride and your vanity in this way. They cause you to be guilty of acts which will do you great harm some day."

The good woman went on for a half hour in this strain. From time to time she made a little pause, as if to await the effects of her discourse ; and finally, as it elicited not a word in response, and as Mimi had gone to a part of the room where she could no longer be seen, Perrine rose from her bed and looked in.

To her astonishment, Mimi was sound asleep. The pink robe, the feathers, the bracelets, and the flagon lay in a shining heap on the floor by the bed, and the lamp smoked on the night table. Perrine looked at this disorderly picture for a moment, then noiselessly extinguished the lamp, muttering as she returned to her room :

"It is no use ; nobody ever made a white plume out of a crow's tail !"

The next day when Mimi awoke the sun was shining full in her window, and she heard the lowings of the cattle as they left their stables.

This sound was enough to make her understand that she was very late.

"Good Heaven!" she exclaimed aloud, and jumped to her feet; "it must be nine o'clock."

"It is a quarter of ten," said a voice from the next room; "and make haste," added Perrine, "for you are needed down stairs."

"Who wants me—Monsieur le Comte?" asked Mimi, carelessly.

"Not at all," answered Dame Perrine, bustling in; "it was Madame Gervais who inquired for you!"

"Madame Gervais! Is she here?"

"Yes, little one, she is here, and the Chevalier and mademoiselle too. They all arrived this morning before it was quite light."

"Is it possible? And I heard not one sound!"

"Mademoiselle, too, has asked for you several times. You ought to go down at once."

"In a moment," answered the girl. Then going to the mirror, she languidly brushed out the rich abundance of her glossy hair.

"Ah, sly-boots! you wrote secretly to mademoiselle," resumed the old woman, "and that is why they all came back to join the Count."

"You see I did very wisely," replied Mimi, with a constrained smile. "They are all together again, and all is for the best."

"Not so," muttered Perrine between her teeth,

"not so. I think it would have been much better if the Count had gone to Paris !"

"It is a fine day, is it not ?" said Mimi, with a profound sigh.

"Yes, magnificent. The wind changed in the night, and a heavy rain fell, which swept away all the snow ; and this morning the sun rose clear and bright as if it were March. Outside the air is soft, and it will be lovely weather for walking at noon. Yes," continued the old woman, with a glance from the window—"yes, and there are mademoiselle and her father in the garden already."

Perrine left the room, and as soon as the door closed behind her, Mimi, cautiously hiding behind the curtains, looked down into the avenue below, and there saw Mademoiselle de Kerbsèjean leaning on her father's arm. At this sight a keen pang of jealousy wrung her heart, tears rolled down her cheeks, and she murmured in a tone of profound bitterness : "Now he has his dearly loved daughter, and I may take refuge in a corner anywhere. He will never think of me again, and no one will take the smallest notice of me !"

It was another half hour before she went down stairs. The family were just seating themselves at table. Mimi, hearing voices in the dining-room, stopped on the threshold and looked through the half-open door. The Count was standing between

his daughter and Madame Gervais, who were already seated, and had not the least look of remembering that only the evening before Mimi had occupied the chair now filled by the Chevalier. The young girl clearly saw that if she did not at once claim the position which the Count had accorded her, she would thenceforward be sent back to the servants' table. She entered the room with a firm step and erect bearing, and went directly to Irène, who welcomed her cordially and said :

"You did well, little Mimi. It was a kind thought of yours to write to us. We came at once to surprise this dear naughty papa, who would not take the trouble to let us know when we might look for him. He tells me that you have been a great comfort to him in his loneliness."

The young girl made a deep courtesy and stood still by the table, looking gradually at the Count, who was for a moment much embarrassed ; then he said, with a sign to Nicolas to place another plate by the side of the Chevalier :

"Little Mimi, take that seat !"

She did not wait for a second invitation, but glided into the chair with the most radiant delight.

Madame Gervais and the Chevalier started. Nicolas darted a terrified glance toward the pantry, where Dame Perrine was counting her sweetmeat pots.

Irène, after her first astonishment, said gently :

“Dear papa ! It was very nice for him to have Mimi dine with him while we were away.”

“She is so bright, and so droll too when she pleases,” answered the Count hastily, looking at Mimi imploringly, as if he were begging her to lay aside the sedate air which she had so suddenly assumed.

But she did not speak through the whole breakfast, but sat quiet and silent. Her curiosity, moreover, was strongly excited by the turn the conversation had taken. The Chevalier was speaking to his nephew of the affection which the De Kersalion ladies had conceived for Irène, and intimated that in future the two families would pass a large portion of each year together.

The Count made no objection to this project, but at heart he was dismayed by it, and was in fact singularly disturbed by the idea of again mingling with people of the world. The Chevalier saw this, and hastened to add :

“Of course we shall be here much more than at Neuilly. Madame de Kersalion is convinced that this change of residence will be of great benefit to her health ; and her daughter asked but one thing, which is to be always with Irène. Their reciprocal affection, their close relationship, and family interests have naturally led to these arrangements, which we trust will meet with your approval, my dear Jean.”

The Count nodded silently, and turning to his daughter said :

"Mademoiselle de Kersalion was very pretty when I knew her years ago ; she resembled you somewhat."

"Ah ! dear papa, you flatter me," cried Irène. "Shall I sketch her for you ! Well, then, dear Louise is beautiful still. Her figure is beautiful ; she has lovely eyes and superb blonde hair. Unhappily, she insists on believing that she is an old maid, and dresses herself befitting that title—not a flower, nor a ribbon, nor a light dress ; her fichus are always thick, her robes always black or gray—not even a knot of blue or pink ribbon at throat or wrist."

"She must be a dark spot in society," observed the Count.

"In society ! Oh ! she never goes out. I could never induce her, not even once, to go with my uncle and myself to a ball or the theatre."

"But at home ?"

"She never makes any toilet for the people who come. My aunt De Kersalion rarely leaves her room. She is not precisely ill, but very delicate. Noise, fatigues, confusion, and people drive her crazy ; and for years she has never received any one—"

"Except the Duke de Renoyal," interrupted Mimi heedlessly.

"Ah ! you know him then ?" said the Cheva-

lier, looking at the girl from under his heavy brows.

"It was Nicolas who told us about him," she answered in some confusion.

"The Duke de Renoyal! I remember him when he was no taller than that," said Monsieur de Kerbséjean, pointing at the table. "His mother was a Kersalion. He was a nice little boy—beloved and spoiled—"

"He remembers you too," interrupted the Chevalier. "When we go to Paris you will renew your acquaintance with each other."

The travelers had passed sixty hours in a post-chaise, and were naturally overwhelmed with fatigue. Immediately after breakfast Madame Gervais carried off Irène, insisting that she must rest; and the Chevalier withdrew also to his own room to sleep for an hour or two.

When Mimi found herself alone with the Count, she exclaimed gayly:

"At last, then, we can laugh a little."

"I ask nothing better," he answered, feeling suddenly as if a weight were lifted from his spirits; "but tell me, little one, why were you so serious during breakfast?"

"Because I saw out of the corner of my eyes that the Chevalier was frowning at me," she answered saucily.

"Come here and get your New Year's gift," returned the Count, drawing from his pocket one

of those lovely ivory boxes, incrustated with gold, which are made only at Bombay.

"Bonbons ! Ah ! thank you. I adore bonbons !" cried Mimi, opening the box ; then she added in a tone of intense disappointment : "It is full of twenty-franc pieces."

"Precisely !" answered the Count, with a hearty laugh ; "there are francs enough there to buy sugar plums and many another thing besides, simpleton !"

"I am very much obliged, sir," said Mimi, dropping the box into her pocket with an air of utter indifference.

"Will you come out and take a little walk ?" asked Monsieur de Kerbséjean. "It is really delightful in the sun."

"I should like nothing better," answered the girl gayly ; "if the thaw has not made the road too muddy, we might go as far as the village."

"We can try at all events," was the Count's reply.

They went out together. Mimi did not venture to take the Count's arm, but she walked close at his side and chattered like a young magpie. The air was spring-like ; a soft damp wind blew in their faces ; the sun had dried the shingly beach, and the fishing vessels anchored in the little harbor were raising their anchors and setting their sails ready to take flight once more. Mimi stood still for a moment and looked at them.

"Don't you think," she said, "that it would be much nicer and far more comfortable to go off in one of those sail-boats than to pick one's way through all these puddles and sharp stones?"

"I do indeed," answered the Count, signaling to a sailor as he spoke.

In a few minutes more they were floating on the tranquil waters of the bay. The Count drew out his watch.

"Half past twelve," he said; "we shall have time to go out to sea. Would you like it, little Mimi?"

"Like it!" she repeated in an ecstasy of delight; "indeed I should!"

This proposition showed her that the Count was by no means so absorbed by the happiness of seeing his family again as she had supposed. She naturally concluded, therefore, that he would continue to feel the same necessity for being amused by her as before his daughter's arrival. Nor was she mistaken; the habit was already fixed, and he was more under her influence than either she or he knew.

Before the dinner hour Mademoiselle de Kerb-séjean and the good uncle went down to the salon, thinking that they should find the Count waiting there for them. They there learned, not without some astonishment, that he was walking with Mimi.

"I will go a little way and meet them," said

Irène, wrapping herself in her pelisse ; “it is growing dark, and they must be here in a minute or two.”

The Chevalier was left alone, and turned for solace to the fire, which he thoughtfully poked for a moment or two. As the wood blazed and the sparks flew up the chimney, he watched them with a sigh. In a moment Madame Gervais came in. She, too, was very thoughtful. Dame Perrine had been talking to her of the strange things which had taken place in the last week, and she was filled with misgivings and with a vague foreboding of the unfortunate ascendancy which Mimi might establish—if indeed the evil were not already done—over the Count. The matter appeared of such importance to her, and the danger so imminent, that she did not hesitate to speak to the Chevalier openly on the subject ; but he did not apparently share her apprehensions.

“I know Jean,” he said ; “his character is weak ; he is always under some one’s influence. I did hope, I must admit, that in these four years he would have become more elevated in his aims, that some ambition might have been awakened in him. I see, however, that I was mistaken ; nothing has changed about him except his figure and his hair. But, notwithstanding his narrow mental capacity and his weakness of character, he is utterly incapable of any baseness. I really see no objection to Mimi’s going out with him if he

desires it ; she may keep him out of worse company. Besides, all this can not last, for I must devote myself seriously to the task of establishing this girl. I must find her a good husband, even if I am compelled to double the dowry her Uncle Tirelon will give her."

It was almost night when the Count returned to the manor. Irène had taken his arm, and Mimi followed them singing aloud. They gathered around the fire in the twilight before they went to table, and the Chevalier said to his nephew :

"If you had come in earlier we could have taken a look at the rooms, which I wish to put as soon as possible into the hands of the workmen."

"What rooms?" asked the Count.

"Why, those of course which Madame de Kersalion and her daughter will occupy in the spring. I gave the orders some little time ago, and the work would have been begun even had I remained in Paris and you in India. But, now that you are here, you can give your advice, and together we will keep the workmen up to the mark. There is a good deal to be done in the garden, too, and Irène particularly wishes a hot-house, to be entered through one of her windows, like the one at Neuilly."

"Ah ! my dear uncle, who told you that?" cried Irène, coloring deeply, as if these words held some allusion.

"I guessed it, sweetheart," answered the Chev-

alier, with a knowing smile ; “and when it is all in order, you can sit there with your dear Louise.”

“With my dear Louise,” said Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean ; “ah ! how happy I should be to see her.”

Early the next day the Chevalier roamed over the whole house, making his plans, which in another week he began to put into execution. The best workmen for miles around were summoned ; and, while they were busy within, an army of laborers were at work outside.

XIII.

LESS than a week after the return of the Kerbséjeans, Célestin Piolot arrived one night at the village, with a stick in his hand and a knapsack on his shoulders. Although worn out with fatigue, he passed directly by his house, and pursued his way until he reached a spot from which he could see the manor.

It was already dark, the wind blew, and the sea broke against the rocks with a hoarse roar. At the first glance nothing could be distinguished ; but in a few moments the heavy mass of the dark manor-house stood out, dotted here and there with luminous points ; and farther off the tops of the forest trees rose to meet the sky thickly sown with shining stars.

This nocturnal sight seemed to fill Célestin with strange delight. Tears rose to his eyes, and he said aloud :

“Now, at least, I can see her every day.”

Then, all out of breath and hardly able to drag one foot after the other, he turned his face homeward. Magni had bolted every door in the old house, but she recognized the voice of her young master, who called her by name after lifting the latch, and she ran hastily down with a lamp in her hand.

“Good heavens !” she cried ; “who would have expected you to-night ! But it is all right ; the house is clear and all in order. Come in quick. The fire is not out, and without disturbing the neighbors I can give you something to eat.”

“I am much more in need of sleep,” answered Célestin, as he followed her wearily.

“But how thin and forlorn you look !” she exclaimed, as she stirred up the fire, and turned the light of the lamp full upon him. “Ah ! my poor boy, you have come back like the prodigal son !”

Célestin shook his head, and answered with a bitter smile :

“It is not pleasure, at all events, that has caused me to look thus.”

“Nor is it work, I am sure,” replied the good woman, looking significantly at the young man’s hands.

“Ah !” he resumed after a moment’s silent

examination of the room, "I like Paris better than here."

"That I can easily believe," grumbled the old woman, "for here you are at home."

Presently Célestin spoke again, with beating heart and in a trembling voice :

"What is going on here ? Have you seen the people at the manor ?"

"Oh ! nothing new," answered Magni—"nothing new, except that the Count is at home again."

"Indeed ! That is the reason, then, that Mademoiselle Irène came home ?"

"You knew she was here, then ?" asked Magni in astonishment.

"I heard so," stammered the young man ; "but you ought to know better than I. Have you seen her ?"

"I saw her only yesterday standing at the door with the Chevalier ; they were superintending a band of workmen."

"Are they going to build ?"

"Not that I am aware of. But they are making great improvements. The painters and glaziers are there now, and they are in great need of a good man like yourself for the locks."

Célestin took no notice of this hint, but sat with his head on his hand by the table which Magni had pushed to his side, and answered the questions she addressed to him by monosyllables.

The next day, when the Chevalier went out to make his morning tour of inspection, he found at the door of the manor-house Célestin Piolot awaiting him. The young workman had resumed his hat and blouse, and carried his bag of tools under his arm. Notwithstanding his night's rest and a good breakfast, cooked for him by Magni, he still looked very tired and pale ; his drawn features told a sad tale ; the mad passion which devoured him had left there traces which a casual observer would naturally confound with those made by excesses. The Chevalier was touched by compassion ; he thought that the follies of youth had impoverished and humiliated him, and that he had returned home humble and penitent.

“ Good morning, my boy,” he said, extending his hand. “ You have been in Paris ; I saw you there in the street two or three times, I am quite sure. I see by looking at you that your excursion has done you no good. You did well to return home. Tell me what your plans are, and tell me, too, if I can serve you in any way.”

“ You are very good, sir,” answered Célestin, encouraged by this cordial greeting. “ I am told that you are repairing the manor, and I have come to ask if you have any work to give me.”

“ More than you can do, my boy,” said the Chevalier eagerly—“ more than you can do ; but I think you ought to rest a few days before you begin.”

"No, sir, that is not necessary : work will do me no harm—quite the contrary." And Célestin looked about him as if to decide where he should at once begin.

"I am really glad to see you so energetic," said the Chevalier ; "therefore you can go to work at once. Come this way."

At breakfast the good man told the story of how Célestin Piolot had appeared before him, and the commiseration which he had felt on seeing the pale, shrunken face, bowed shoulders, and almost squalid appearance of the young fellow.

"Who knows," he said, "what has become of the gold pieces of that poor Cattel ? The grandson has spent them all, I fear ; but now he has reformed. When he came to me to-day, he asked for work. I gave it to him, and in ten minutes he was settled down at work as if it were all he desired in the world."

On hearing these words Mimi laughed a low, gurgling laugh, and looked at Irène, who, however, preserved an indifferent silence. Madame Gervais, however, spoke at once.

"He is very skillful, I am told, and will probably do very much better than any of your other men," she said. "I could not bear to see them touch those beautiful old locks in the salon."

The same day Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean entered the room where Célestin was at work with several companions. She bowed to him very

coldly, as one greets a person whom one scarcely knows, and to whom one has accorded no second thought, and then turned away in real, not affected indifference. The young man returned her greeting, but did not speak. It was the first time for months that he had heard the sound of her voice, which thrilled him from head to foot. The perfume from her garments caused him to feel faint and ill ; and when Irène left the room, he dropped into a chair with his head in his hands, yielding to these ecstatic emotions.

“What is the matter?” said one of his companions, looking round at him ; “is he sick?”

“No,” answered another ; “he is tired, I fancy, for he is none too fond of work.”

In the mean time Célestin blessed his lot and prayed to Heaven to prolong his happiness. Had all his wishes been gratified, every lock in the manor-house would have broken, one after another. This of course could not be ; yet he thought there was work enough to be done to occupy him up to the end of the winter. This brief period was really the happiest part of his life. The presence of Irène touched and soothed his troubled spirit. When he saw her pass, so serene and lovely in her maidenly beauty, he was tempted to fall down at her feet and worship her as a celestial vision ; but no indication of these secret transports appeared in his reserved demeanor.

Madame Gervais herself, who watched him

with considerable distrust at first, ended by supposing him to be entirely cured of his folly. As to Mimi, she no longer cared to penetrate his thoughts, and took not the slightest notice of him.

The girl continued to amuse the Count with her eccentricities, and had succeeded in placing herself under his special protection. When she feared Madame Gervais's reprimands or Perrine's scoldings, she took refuge with him, and then braved them openly.

Monsieur de Kerbséjean had not resumed his old habits ; he never went out in the evening, but he was so little with the members of his household that they would hardly have missed him had he done so. He rose late, smoked a portion of the day, and never joined his family except at meals. After dinner he played dominoes with Mimi, and sustained, not without considerable exertion on his part, a brief conversation with the Chevalier, spoke in an affectionate manner to his daughter of the rain and of the weather generally, and retired punctually at ten o'clock.

Several weeks elapsed in this way, and it was now the middle of February. There was a feeling of spring in the air—an occasional soft balmy whiff that suggested all sorts of growing things. The works, executed under the eyes of the Chevalier, were going on rapidly. The workmen had completed the new hot-house, and the gardener

had filled it. A rustic fountain was at one end, and a huge magnolia stood glossy and superb on either side of this fountain, while violets were beginning to bloom by the side of the narrow path that led through the building. The day that all was completed Irène dragged her father thither to admire it.

"Dear papa," she said tenderly, "we will have here some of the plants you liked when you were away from us so long. Would you not like to sit with me under a palm-tree?"

"Certainly I should like it," he said, drawing aside a little that Mimi might pass. The girl looked about with an indifferent, rather contemptuous air, and said in a low voice :

"Well, is this the great mystery? Is this all the reason that we were told never to come in here? I see nothing but a few green things, some stones, and a good deal of glass. The place looks to me, in fact, like a huge lantern."

The Count seemed to regard this comparison as deliciously funny ; he nodded to Mimi, and said to his daughter :

"She is very amusing, is she not?"

Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean sadly dropped her father's arm and turned away. The Chevalier now joined them, and his arrival put a bridle on Mimi's tongue ; for, notwithstanding her natural audacity, she had never yet found courage to laugh and jest in his presence. The calm gaze of

astonishment he riveted upon her, on the few occasions when he had heard her speak without being first addressed, was quite enough to repress her. As soon as he appeared, therefore, though offered a chair by the Count, Mimi left the conservatory, and seated herself on the steps outside, with her arms wrapped in her shawl and her feet stretched out in the sunshine.

In a few moments Monsieur de Kerbséjean lounged out and joined her. Irène followed him with her eyes, and, turning to the Chevalier, she said with a sigh :

“Poor papa ! he has been so long accustomed to an active life that his present repose seems dullness to him, and I fear that he is tired of us all.”

“You have noticed this, then ?” asked her uncle in a tone of tender pity.

“Alas ! yes, from almost the first day of his return. He loves us, of course I know that perfectly well ; but our society is not enough for him ; he is in perpetual need of other amusement. He is not sad or quiet by nature, and the very fact that he likes to have Mimi always near him, that he enjoys her gay chatter and little jokes, shows that he likes noise and confusion.”

The Chevalier did not speak for a minute or two, and then he said suddenly :

“I see but one thing to do, and that is to carry him off to Paris.”

“Ah !” murmured Irène, “could we go soon ?”

“In a week at the latest.”

“In a week !” cried his niece in astonishment.

“Would you prefer to make it later, then ?” asked the Chevalier, with a smile that brought the color to Irène’s cheek.

Dropping her long lashes over her eyes, she said quietly :

“It is for you to decide. I will obey you in this, as in all things.”

“You will be overjoyed to see your dear Louise, will you not ? Go, my child—go and tell Madame Gervais our plans.”

“Oh ! she will be delighted, because she loves me so much that she is always pleased with all that pleases me.”

The Chevalier went to his nephew, led him aside, and, walking up and down the terrace, informed him of the impending trip. He looked for some opposition, but to his surprise the Count made none. On the contrary, he seemed much pleased at the prospect, and he replied without hesitation :

“Let us go to Paris by all means ; the journey will be agreeable to every one. Young girls are never so happy as when they are flying about from place to place.”

“I believe Irène will be very glad to go back to Paris,” said the Chevalier gayly.

There was no time for further discussion, and by a tacit understanding the subject was avoided that evening at table in Mimi's presence.

The next morning Madame Gervais was down stairs at an unusually early hour, and met the Chevalier in the hall.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed; "is Irène ill?"

"No, thank Heaven! she is well and asleep. I come down hoping to find you. I wanted to tell you of a matter that troubles quite as much as it astonishes me. Last evening, when Mimi entered her room, she was in a state of the greatest delight; and she said to Perrine: 'How shall you like being left here all alone? for we are going to spend the last days of the Carnival in Paris!'"

"Why, who on earth talked of taking her?"

"The Count, apparently."

"Then he must tell her to the contrary, for Mademoiselle Mimi will stay behind, I assure you."

"It would be better for us all if you found some other home for the girl," answered Madame Gervais; "for I really fear that she will sooner or later bring some great trouble upon us. In my opinion she can not remain here without risking the happiness of your family. Excuse my plain speech, but this is no time for ceremony."

"I do not understand you in the least!" cried the Chevalier, in a state of bewilderment. "Do

you mean that there is some love affair going on between herself and some one of the workmen?"

"Was there ever such blindness!" murmured the governess under her breath.

"What do you suspect?" urged the Chevalier.

"I suspect nothing—I see clearly." After a moment's hesitation she added: "I see the Count's very great weakness."

"I admit all that," answered the Chevalier tranquilly; "but I know my nephew, as I have before told you. You can not attach any importance to what he does. Formerly he spent his time at the *Café de Neptune*, in the company of his friends the coast-guards: to-day he spends mornings and evenings in the society of *Mademoiselle Mimi*, but when he loses sight of her he will forget her in two or three days."

"I do not agree with you," murmured *Madame Gervais*—"I do not agree with you in the least."

The Chevalier decided that an explanation was necessary with his nephew, and the sooner the better. He went at once to the Count's room, and found him in his dressing-gown and slippers, giving some important directions to *Nicolas*, who was on his knees in front of a huge trunk.

"Beginning to pack already?" said the Chevalier; "you are indeed taking time by the forelock."

"I was measuring the trunk. Yes, certainly, Nicolas, it can go with us."

The Chevalier made a sign to the servant, who at once left the room, and then, turning to his nephew, he said :

"What on earth do you want with an edifice like that? It would fill up the entire imperial of a diligence." Then he added quietly : "We travel post, you know, in the berlin."

"But the berlin has but four seats !"

"And what then ?" asked the Chevalier.

"Why, I don't see how we can all go in the berlin."

"And why not ? Irène and Madame Gervais on the back seat, and we two in front."

"But Mimi—where should we put her ?"

"We shall not put her anywhere. We shall leave her precisely where she is. Do you mean that you thought of taking that child? How utterly preposterous !"

Monsieur de Kerbséjean shook his head with the air of a man who does not care to discuss a question on which his mind is fully made up.

"It can not be," continued the Chevalier.

"And why not, pray ?" exclaimed the Count angrily.

"Do you ask me such a question seriously ?" asked the Chevalier, shrugging his shoulders. "Mademoiselle Mimi is a person who will not spend her whole life with us ; she would be utterly out

of place in the society in which we move. It was wrong—I see my error now in admitting her to our intimacy ; and I think that this will be an excellent time to break up habits which can not continue.”

The Count had changed countenance at this, and was evidently annoyed and embarrassed. Instead of replying to the point, he said :

“No one here loves that poor child ; I am well aware of that fact, which is one reason the more for me to protect her. I promised her that she should go to Paris, and I shall keep my word.”

“Indeed !” interrupted the Chevalier coldly. “I should say that you were a little out of your head. What would you do with that girl when you arrived at Madame de Kersalion’s ? By what name or title would you present her ? What sort of appearance would she make in a salon ? And pray how would it sound to hear the Kerbsé-jean family announced, and—Mademoiselle Mimi Tirelon ? A fine name, upon my word !”

“She can change it,” said the Count sulkily.

At these words the Chevalier gazed fixedly at his nephew. He could not believe his ears. He suddenly saw the empire which Mimi had acquired over this man, and the consequences which might arise from this monstrous folly. He controlled himself, however, and after the first mo-

ment he concealed his indignation, and the Count could believe that, even if his uncle had heard, he had not understood.

There was a long silence ; then the Chevalier said :

“I have been putting off from day to day an important communication which I had to make to you : it is in relation to the establishment of your daughter.”

“You have some match in view, then ?”

“Yes, and a very brilliant one. We will talk of this later, however,” replied the Chevalier, rising.

Madame Gervais was waiting in the salon.

“Well ?” she said, going toward the Chevalier.

The worthy man sank into a chair, suffocating with astonishment and indignation.

“You were right,” he exclaimed ; “this girl has bewitched my nephew.”

“She meant no harm,” answered the governess, “and has not the least idea of what she has done. Pride, not unmixed with jealousy, has influenced her ; she wished to share with Irène the Count’s affection. Without knowing it, she has gone further than she intended. Be assured that she has no suspicion of the real sentiments he entertains toward her.”

“But such perverse innocence is as bad as vice !” cried the Chevalier.

“And the Count insisted that he would take Mimi to Paris?” continued Madame Gervais.

The Chevalier nodded. He really did not dare repeat to Madame Gervais the words which had so startled him, and he said simply :

“Who can say how far this folly may go? As soon as I am certain that my suspicions are well founded, I shall take away my niece at once, and her father will never dare to ask me for her. But, thank Heaven! the time is not far off when she will have another protector.”

Irène entered at this moment.

“What has happened?” she said, after having embraced her uncle, “you look so solemn, and Madame Gervais is very sad!”

“Monsieur le Chevalier is much annoyed,” said the governess simply. “This journey of which we were speaking may not take place—”

“And you will not see your dear Louise as soon as you hoped, my child,” said the Chevalier, drawing his niece toward him, and kissing her brow.

“It is only a happiness deferred,” she answered half sadly.

There was nothing more said of going to Paris for the remainder of the winter, and things went on to all appearance without any change at the manor.

But contentment and peace did not reign in all hearts. Monsieur de Kerbséjean’s face indi-

cated at times the restlessness of an ungratified passion; and the Chevalier, who watched him with restrained anger and contempt, saw that he was gradually becoming very unhappy.

As to Mimi, she suddenly grew strangely negligent of the Count, and no longer took any pains to please him. Either she was convinced of her power, or she was simply weary; and a sort of apathy succeeded her turbulent gayety. Irène alone was the same; her serenity was unimpaired. She bore on her brow the seal of a happy destiny, and her air commanded respect, admiration, and love.

The Chevalier was determined to send Mimi away. The Count suspected this design, and neglected no opportunity to make his uncle understand that he himself intended her to remain a fixture at the manor-house. A certain secret bitterness existed in the relations between the men of the house, which would have burst its boundaries undoubtedly if the most unexpected catastrophe had not changed the whole aspect of things.

One morning the news of the revolution of February and the overthrow of Louis Philippe reached the house. A single journal brought the vaguest possible details, and predicted great misfortunes. The next day brought confirmation of all these disasters. The pillage and burning of Neuilly were *faits accomplis*. The most ap-

palling excesses had been committed, and the number of victims had not yet been ascertained.

The courier had brought no letter from the Kersalion ladies, and this silence was very hard to bear. Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean was in tears ; the Chevalier, in mortal anxiety, determined to go to Paris if he had no news from their relations the next day ; and Madame Gervais was too much disturbed herself to be successful in keeping up Irène's spirits and courage.

The intelligence of the revolution produced a great excitement among the men at work in the manor. They disappeared at once, and showed no intention of resuming their labors. Never had the Café de Neptune been so crowded. Speeches were made by tipsy orators, mounted on tables ; and from morning until night the walls rang with patriotic melodies. On the afternoon of the third day Célestin Piolot presented himself at the manor decorated with a tricolor cockade, and with a number of newspapers in his hand ; he came to offer his protection to the family.

"I have received good news," he said with an air of great importance ; "there is every probability that Ravachon will be sent to this department with very extended powers."

Notwithstanding his anxiety and the gravity of the position, the Chevalier could not restrain a smile.

"Your friend the poet ?" he cried. "Upon

my word, it strikes me he would be a singular man for the position."

"He writes just as good prose as he does verses," said the young man, gravely.

"Oh, I do not doubt it !"

"With his capacity he will climb high ; of that I am very sure. From this day out his chances are of the best. He has intimate friends in the government. When he arrives I will present him to you, if you desire it."

"Thanks," said the Chevalier. "I have no favors to ask of him. All my ambition now is to live quietly among my family. It is to be hoped that people who, like us, are totally out of political and public life, will be let alone."

"The people will not abuse their victory !" replied Célestin, with great dignity, and thereupon made a bow and retired.

As he was going out he caught sight of Irène's pale face at a window. He started, and murmured half aloud, his heart swelling with pride and joy :

"Fraternity is no longer a mere word ! Prejudices are abolished, and I am the equal of the Kerbséjeans !"

That same night at twilight the whole family were gathered about the fire in the salon. Irène, Madame Gervais, and the Chevalier, sat a little apart ; the Count, buried in his deep chair, seemed to be sleeping with his eyes open ; and Mimi, seat-

ed on a cushion in the corner of the chimney, yawned behind a newspaper that she had folded into the shape of a screen. A violent pull at the bell interrupted this silence and made every one start. At the same moment the dogs barked furiously in the court, and the Chevalier's terrier rushed toward the door with a wild yelp.

"There are strangers at the gate," exclaimed Irène.

The gentlemen both started to their feet, while Mimi, looking slowly round, said :

"Ah ! we are to have company, it seems !"

"No one will open the gate without an order from me," said the Chevalier. "Remain here, all of you. I will go down and see who it is. In the days of the first republic unexpected visits were only too often received."

He took his hat and went out, Irène following him as far as he would permit. Nicolas and the gardener were waiting with lanterns at the gate, which was not more than a hundred feet from the house.

Irène, on the threshold, listened with her heart in her mouth ; then she uttered a stifled cry and rushed back to the salon. She could not speak, and she trembled from head to foot ; but her face, though pale, was radiant with joy. She sank into a chair at the side of Madame Gervais, and stammered :

"I do not know, but I believe I recognized—

in fact, I think that there are friends at our gate."

Before she could explain herself more clearly, the Chevalier entered, having on his arm an elderly lady. Behind them were a younger lady and a gentleman.

"Aunt ! dear Louise," cried Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean.

Many were the embraces and kisses. In the mean time the Chevalier presented the young man to his nephew, saying :

"My dear Jean, this is the Duke de Renoyal, whom you would not have recognized, probably, without this introduction."

Monsieur de Kerbséjean extended his hand to the young man, and went forward to welcome the ladies. When every one was comfortably settled around the fire, the Chevalier begged for an explanation of this sudden appearance of these beloved relatives. The old lady took it upon herself to answer these questions and make the requisite explanation.

"Do you know that my house at Neuilly is in ashes ?" she began, in her thin, sad little voice. "When we left the torches had been applied ; we heard the shouts of the incendiaries and the roar of the flames, which in fact lighted our road for a mile or more. I can not talk to you of the horrors of these last days. You will see it all in the journals. I will only tell you that at the sight of these

ragged bands, which came in every direction with all sorts of arms, I was so afraid that I could not stay in my room. Strength was given me, and I came down stairs for the first time for years. With the first hint of danger my nephew had come to me with a number of his servants ; they barricaded the doors and pointed guns from all the windows ; but I did not care to try a siege, and begged Gaston not to risk his life in our defense, but to take us away at once if it were possible. It seemed to me that we could never go far enough from the capital of the civilized world ! Louise was not so terrified as myself, and I honestly think would have liked to face the enemy ; but when I spoke of taking shelter in Brittany, she was in greater haste even than myself to depart. My nephew did not hesitate to accompany us, and together we crossed this disturbed and unhappy country. I assure you that it is neither agreeable nor convenient to travel in the territory of the republic. We were obliged to exhibit our passports every few minutes, I might say, or at all events every few miles. Our passports were by no means correct, but fortunately the people who examined them could not read, and Gaston gave them explanations which proved that we were not imperiling the safety of the country by our hurried journey. When we reached Morlaix we could get no horses ; we were told that we must wait until late to-morrow. We therefore pre-

ferred to leave our carriage there and hire one of the vehicles of the country. This rickety thing broke down a half league from here, and we decided to make the rest of our journey on foot. Just think of it ! I have not for several years walked across my room. But I was so happy at being near you that I did not once feel my fatigue."

"Dear aunt, had we only known," exclaimed Irène, "we would have gone to meet you ; but we had no idea of the happiness in store for us."

"Do you know, my child, that we have made wonderful plans on our journey ?" said Mademoiselle de Kersalion finally. "My cousin wishes to exchange his hotel in the Faubourg Saint-Germain for some old château near the sea, and my mother has decided to buy a place in this vicinity and establish herself permanently here in Brittany."

"But where is the need of all these changes and acquisitions ?" replied the Chevalier gayly. "There is room for everybody here ; and, if there is not, we will add a wing to the manor. My dear Duke, such is Bréton hospitality, and I hope you will not refuse it."

"On the contrary. I accept it with a most grateful heart," replied the young man, much moved.

"Fortunately, we have already turned the matter over in our minds," continued the Chevalier in the same jesting tone ; "and, while the new wing is building, you must all be content with the

apartments which have just been restored and refurnished. Irène seems to have had a presentiment of what was going to happen, for she has hurried the workmen on, so that everything is now ready and waiting for you."

"Yes, aunt," said Irène, drawing a low seat to the feet of the old lady, "you can go, whenever you are ready, to your rooms. Perrine and your own maid will soon arrange things as you like them, and you will forget that you are not in Paris. Your meals shall all be served in your own dressing-room."

"By no means!" cried the old lady. "I do not intend to take possession of my sofa again. I shall dine at the table with you. The air of this country seems to have restored my strength, and I feel perfectly well!"

An hour later Nicolas threw open the folding-doors, and announced dinner. Monsieur de Kerbséjean offered his arm to his aunt, and the Chevalier took in Mademoiselle de Kersalion, while Irène was left to the Duke. He approached her, and said in a low voice :

"When you were at your aunt's I occasionally had the pleasure of taking you into dinner ; may I do so again ?"

She answered with a timid glance, and laid her hand on his arm. They walked slowly into the dining-room, she with downcast eyes listening to something he was whispering.

Then Mimi came out of the corner where she had sat unseen and shrouded by the window curtains. The girl felt that she was utterly forgotten. She hesitated for a moment, and then glided into the dining-room, and stood behind the Count. He turned toward her and said in a low voice, while the others were taking their seats :

“You can not dine with us to-day, poor little Mimi. But do not be vexed ; it will not last long, I assure you !”

Madame Gervais had foreseen this complication, and she was waiting in the anteroom.

“Come, Mimi,” she said, going forward to meet the girl as she left the dining-room with a dismal countenance ; “come and dine with me.”

“Thank you,” answered the girl without stopping ; “I am not hungry.”

Madame Gervais tried to arrest her fleet steps, but she would not stay, and ran lightly up the stairs. When Mimi entered her room, she sank on a chair and burst into a wild tempest of tears—tears of rage and fury. Never had her heart been so full of bitterness ; never had she felt so insulted and humiliated. She realized for the first that, notwithstanding the influence she had undoubtedly acquired over the Count, her position was an inferior one, and that in the eyes of these strangers—and this thought wounded her more than anything else—she was absolutely without

consequence. It seemed to her that these strangers had come to take her place in the family.

She remained up stairs alone for a couple of hours, in the darkness and cold. How much longer she would have stayed can not be known ; for all at once there came a light tap at the door. She did not answer, thinking that it was Perrine or Madame Gervais ; then, as the door was gently pushed open, she called out with some impatience :

“ Who is that ? ”

“ It is I, Mimi,” answered the Count. “ Where are you, my poor child, and what are you doing here without a light ? ”

“ Nothing,” she said, going to him and taking his hand to guide him. “ It is indeed very dark here, but I will light a candle.”

The Count shivered at the touch of this cold soft hand ; his dull senses were touched, and he murmured with a sigh :

“ Oh ! my darling little Mimi.”

“ Sit there,” she said, pushing him toward a chair, and then proceeded to light two candles on her toilette table.

The Count was so disturbed that he pulled his chair to the fireplace, and extended his hands as if to warm them, although there was not a spark of fire ; and he said without looking at Mimi :

“ How bored I have been this evening ! ”

“ And yet you were in very grand company,”

she said coldly—"two great ladies and a noble lord. You ought to have found it very charming."

"I dare say ; but they are far too clever for me, and I was very uncomfortable. Look here, Mimi, I like to be here with you a thousand times better ; and I would rather hear your chatter than all that intellectual conversation."

"What were they saying ?"

"How can I tell ! They were talking of a thousand things, and changed the subject so suddenly that it was impossible to follow them. I remember, however, that Mademoiselle de Kersalion spoke of you."

"Of me ! Has she seen me ?"

"Yes ; when you left the room she said your eyes were Moorish and magnificent."

"And the Duke ?"

"He did not say anything."

Mimi was sitting with her arm on the toilette table. She turned to the mirror and contemplated her velvety eyes, her lips like a pomegranate blossom, and the graceful contour of her head and face. Then turning toward the Count, she said coquettishly :

"Tell me, am I pretty ?"

"You are beautiful !" he exclaimed with enthusiasm ; "you are beautiful enough to drive a man out of his senses."

"Really !" she said, throwing her head back

with a haughty air. "Am I really so beautiful? So much the better for me," she added with a laugh.

The Count saw that she had not understood him, and that she had no suspicion of the passion which consumed him. This conviction restrained the impetuous avowal which was ready to leap from his lips. He pushed back his chair, and said with a strong effort at self-control :

"It is growing late ; the ladies had retired when I came up. Irène is in Mademoiselle Kersalion's room, and my uncle is still chatting with the Duke in the salon. The best thing I can do, I fancy, is to take my departure ; so good night, little Mimi."

Dame Perrine appeared only a few moments after the Count left, bringing Mimi's supper on a tray. The good woman was in her heart perfectly delighted that Mimi had been ejected from the place to which the Count had seen fit to elevate her ; but she had a certain compassion for the girl nevertheless, and was disposed to do all that was in her power to console her.

"There, naughty child !" she said, as she placed the tray on a table, "I have looked out for you to-night, although you did not deserve it. Why did you not take your dinner with Madame Gervais ?"

"Because I preferred to be alone," answered Mimi, rudely.

"Do you intend, then, to shut yourself up for the rest of your life within the four walls of this room?" asked good old Perrine, shrugging her shoulders.

"By no means," answered Mimi. "Look at me!" she cried, raising her arms and snapping her fingers above her head, as if they were castanets—"look! My grief is over; I am happy again!"

"Then you have some mischief in your head," said Perrine, doubtfully.

"Not at all. I have been thinking of the grand company that came to-day, and it has put me in good humor. That old lady is very funny, with her little figure, little voice, and little health."

"Miss Mimi, you are very disrespectful!" exclaimed Perrine, utterly scandalized.

"Her daughter does not resemble her," continued Mimi, calmly; "she belongs to another race apparently. She looks like a green katydid, with her slender neck and her long thin figure."

"Perhaps the Duke's figure pleases you better?" said Perrine, maliciously.

"I did not notice him," answered Mimi, falsely.

"Truly?" said Perrine, with an expression of utter incredulity. "I suppose you did not notice that he is a very handsome man."

Mimi shook her head.

"At all events, you had plenty of time to find out how he looked," continued Perrine; "for

when the ladies went to their rooms before dinner, you never moved from your corner. I saw you looking at the Duke with all the eyes in your head. Then when he went to dress, you slipped out in front of him : and when he came down the stairs, you were at his heels again. Don't talk to me, Miss Mimi ; you know every feature in his face."

The young girl shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed :

"Hasn't he got dear little feet, Dame Perrine ? weren't they lovely with their shining shoes and silk stockings !"

XIV.

IN those families which pride themselves on preserving the traditions of the past, and where one still finds a certain simplicity of manners and habits, the domestic hearth is inaccessible to all outside influences. At the manor no one seemed to realize the shock and current of the events which were then taking place in France, and which were startling the whole civilized world. The inhabitants of the Kerbséjean mansion ignored and forgot them. After the first moment of indignant surprise and consternation, they turned away from the political orgy and took refuge in the peaceable sanctuary of home life.

The new-comers speedily dropped into their places in this quiet home, and each one promptly carried out his own occupations and habits.

Madame de Kersalion spent the morning in her invalid-chair on the terrace, where she drank in the invigorating sea-breezes. She often said, with the calm selfishness of a woman who has passed the greater part of her life upon her couch, a prey to all those varieties of neuralgia which make the fortune and the despair of physicians : " Really, I ought to be very much obliged to those good creatures who set fire to my house, for they have rendered me a signal service. I have never been so well as since they gave me that awful fright."

Monsieur de Renoyal passed a large portion of his time in the library, with the Chevalier. Both gentlemen were deeply interested in archæology. Gaston de Renoyal was a serious and elegant man, who had seen enough of the world to be willing to leave it and retire to the country. His cousin, Mademoiselle de Kersalion, shared his sentiments ; she was now very happy, and was almost tempted to rejoice at the tempest which had thrown her on this hospitable shore.

When the suns of March had given a faint tinge of green to the fields, and the violets and snowdrops peered out along the paths, the dwellers in the manor-house took long walks through the woods, along the slopes of the hills, and down

in the valleys, celebrated as the places where the Druids offered up their sacrifices. Not far from the shore, in a meadow which down to this day bears the name *Parc au Dolmen*, stands one of these monuments of Druidical worship in which the whole of Brittany is rich. Superb brown moss carpets the rough stones arranged in the form of an altar. A wild rose had pushed its way out from among the blocks, and its graceful branches hung over the hewn-out basin which once held the blood of the human victims. The dense woods which at some remote period surrounded this sinister spot had now disappeared; but an oak, sole relic of the sacred forest, yet threw its shadow over the dolmen. Strangers often came to this place, and lingered to gaze on these vestiges of past ages, or reposed on the soft turf which was thick and grew around the altar. When Irène seated herself in front of this mass of gray stones and threw her beautiful blonde hair back from her haughty brow, she looked like one of those young Druidesses whom the people of ancient Brittany regarded as possessed of divine attributes, come to revisit this desolated sanctuary of her terrible god.

Since the arrival of the new inmates of the manor, Mimi kept herself away from the family with the most obstinate perseverance; she never appeared in the salon even at those hours when she was sure of seeing no one but Irène and

Mademoiselle de Kersalion talking over their embroidery. The Count rarely saw her; she avoided him too, seeming to have lost all pleasure in his society. Yet she by no means lived a life of confinement in her chamber; as Perrine said, no one could take a step in the house without seeing the flutter of the girl's dress around an angle; and she especially affected the deep windows in the corridors. The truth was that she was all the time trying to catch sight of a person of whom the most fleeting glimpse aroused in her heart a whirl of passionate emotion; and Gaston de Renoyal might have said with truth that he always found her in his path, sometimes rosy and smiling, oftener sad and thoughtful; but he took no notice of her, and never for one moment imagined that this beautiful young creature was madly in love with him.

Some weeks slowly passed away. It was now April, and almost every day the inhabitants of the manor made long excursions through the picturesque country which extends from Morlaix to the Bay of Goulven. One morning they decided to visit the beautiful gardens around Roscoff—a drive of about three leagues. Madame de Kersalion and the Chevalier occupied one carriage with Monsieur de Kerbséjean, while the Duke de Renoyal, Irène, and Mademoiselle de Kersalion started on horseback and galloped along the hard beach. As soon as the gates closed after the de-

parture of the party, Mimi came down to the terrace, and, leaning on the stone parapet, followed with her eyes the movements of the two ladies and the duke as long as she could see them: then, when they disappeared, she passed her handkerchief over her burning eyes, and said with some bitterness:

“They are happy!”

Almost at the same moment a voice from below cried out:

“Good morning, Mademoiselle Mimi!”

She looked down quickly, and answered as she lightly waved a salutation with her handkerchief:

“Good morning, Célestin Piolot; what are you doing? Come in and rest awhile.”

The young man hesitated.

“Come in,” urged Mimi. “There is no one here; they are riding and driving. If you had come a few minutes earlier you would have seen them starting.”

Célestin entered the gate, and Mimi rose to meet him.

“It is a very long time since you were here,” she said, as she led him to the terrace. “Are you never going to work any more at the manor?”

“That depends,” he answered evasively. “Since Ravachon arrived, I have been all the time occupied with him. We have gone through

the department together, and I returned only yesterday evening."

"There is plenty of work for you still," continued Mimi. "Nothing is absolutely completed, and you have the locks, you know, to put on all the doors of the beautiful new hot-house."

"I have no objection ; but I must wait a few days, for public business comes before everything else."

"Ah ! you are still in the government ?"

"I owe it all my personal support. Ravachon will be here to-morrow. There are great questions at issue. The elections are near at hand, and we are coming to talk to the Kerbséjeans."

"You will find plenty of company in the salon nowadays," said Mimi, with a glance at the young man's costume.

"Whom do you mean ? Those Parisian ladies and their cousin ? What do I care ? You will see how I shall talk to them. We are all now on an equality ; or rather, I rank both the Kerbséjeans on account of my being the first municipal magistrate. My nomination came this morning, and I am now mayor of the commune of P——."

"That will not impress them much," murmured Mimi.

"I could have had any position I wished," resumed Célestin Piolot with an important air. "With such friends as mine and the influence I

have, anything is attainable. They wanted to give me a much finer office, but I did not wish to go away from here."

"Ah!" said Mimi, "you have not changed or forgotten anything then?"

Célestin took no notice of her words, but looked at her attentively.

"Mademoiselle Mimi," he said, "I find you very much changed; you are very thin, and look really ill. Are you well?"

"No," she answered coldly—"no, I am not well, and I think I am dying!"

"Good Heavens! what do you mean?" exclaimed Célestin Piolot, greatly shocked.

"I am dying of grief," said Mimi, in the same tone of cold indifference.

The young man took her hand and looked her full in the eyes, with a tender earnestness which was a tacit entreaty for fuller confidence; but she shook her head as if to make him understand that in the depths of her heart was hidden a secret which could never cross her lips. A sudden suspicion came like a flash of inspiration to Célestin. He smiled, and said significantly:

"There have been some handsome young fellows among the men who were at work here!"

"How dare you say such a thing to me!" cried Mimi indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," said Célestin apologetically; "but if you had given your heart to one

of these good fellows, no one would have blamed you of course ; for such a fancy on your part could have no other end than your marriage."

"I shall never marry—no, never !" she repeated, angry and ashamed.

"You love some one, then, whom you can never marry," exclaimed Célestin impetuously, and hardly realizing the full force of his words.

Mimi trembled lest she had betrayed herself, and hastened to say :

"I am disgusted and weary with my life here. I can not endure it any longer."

"Is it possible? And yet you have been all these years with the Kerbséjeans ! They have always treated you well, that I know from my own observation."

"I have no complaints to make of them," answered Mimi with a somber air ; "but accursed be the day that I crossed their threshold ! I was never made to live here ; and never—you understand—never can I learn to like it, or even to become accustomed to it. They might much better have left me with your old grandmother ; she would have driven me from her door, and I should have gone back to my old life. Ah me ! how often I dream of those days, when I wandered from town to town with my father—that dear father who loved me so fondly."

The girl's voice broke and tears rushed to her eyes.

“Do you see that turfy bank?” she resumed after a few moments, leaning over the parapet and pointing out the place to Célestin. “It was there that my father and I sat side by side for the last time. Yesterday, two poor children—two vagabonds, as they are called—halted in that same spot. They were brother and sister, I fancy. The boy had a long coat, much too large for him, and shoes equally disproportioned; on his back was a little cage, and in it a forlorn marmoset. The girl was as wretched-looking as her brother—she was in rags, with a bundle of printed songs strapped to her waist. But they both looked happy, and laughed aloud at the marmoset, who was playing on the turf. I cried my eyes out when I saw them, and was tempted to follow them. Yes, and if, instead of going toward Saint Pol, they had taken the road to Morlaix, I should have called out to them to wait for me, and I should have gone with them!”

“Do you love no one here, then?” asked Célestin reproachfully—“not one among all these persons who have been so kind to you?”

“No, not one,” she replied with cold frankness.

These words revolted the young man and chilled the sympathy with which he had received Mimi’s confidences. He dropped her hand, and after a silence he resumed, looking toward the garden :

"You say there is still something to be done in the hot-house?"

"Come and see," she said, leading the way.

They went toward the fragile edifice, whose raised sashes allowed them a glimpse of a rustic fountain flashing among shining leaves and flowers of every hue just bursting into bloom.

"It was Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean who designed this beautiful spot," said Célestin in admiration.

"And you worked on it night and day, one might say," answered Mimi significantly; "it was your own hand that put in all that iron-work. But I am quite sure that you had no idea why mademoiselle was in such haste to finish her glass cage."

Célestin heard these last words, but did not notice them. He stood in the center of the greenhouse, and looked around with sad pleasure. Had he been alone, he would have fallen on his knees before the chair where Irène usually sat, and kissed the prints of her feet still faintly discernible on the gravel.

Mimi looked at him for a moment, and then, gently touching him on the arm, she said in a low voice :

"Are you still in love with mademoiselle?"

At this unexpected question Célestin was much disturbed, and stammered some incoherent sentence.

"You love her still—that I see very clearly," continued Mimi, shrugging her shoulders with a look of disdainful pity. "Very well, you are mad, and I am sorry for you. That is all there is about it. She will never love you, you know!"

"Until this time I have never had the least hope," answered Célestin.

"And now?"

"And now—who knows?" replied Célestin with ingenuous presumption.

Mimi burst into a shrill laugh, and then looking the young man full in his face as if to watch the full effect of the blow she dealt, she said:

"You flatter yourself that her heart is untouched. You are mistaken; she loves the Duke de Renoyal."

Célestin turned pale and leaned his head on his arms, which were crossed on one of the light pillars supporting the roof of the glass house.

"She loved him when she was in Paris," continued Mimi pitilessly. "Mademoiselle de Kersalion is her confidante. I have listened at their doors, and I have heard all they have said. Do you know why she wanted this hot-house built? No, of course not. You can not know, but I do, and I will tell you. Because it was in a place like this that she saw Monsieur de Renoyal for the first time. When she comes here, and remains here alone for hours, it is to think and dream of

him. I think she would like to live here altogether, wrapped in these recollections."

"And he loves her also?" interrupted Célestin.

Mimi shook her head, and answered with an air of profound conviction :

"No—he loves no one !"

The preoccupations of his recent life had in some degree deadened the passion which the young man had allowed to take full possession of his heart ; but it sprang to life again at this unexpected intelligence. He felt a frightful pang of jealousy as he thought of the rival who had but to show himself to win Irène's heart. He hated him at once, but being one of those men whose illusions are most tenacious, he by no means relinquished the vague hopes born of the late political revulsion.

"Ah, well !" said Mimi after a long silence, "do you still intend to remain here ?"

"Yes," he answered without any hesitation.

"Then you still have a hope ?"

"Yes, just so long as she is not married."

The young workman soon took his departure, and Mimi passed the rest of the day walking up and down the terrace, with her eyes fixed on the road by which the party must return ; but they did not come until night. It was not so dark, however, but that the Count saw her in spite of her precipitate retreat behind a pillar. He had

not seen her for two days, for she no longer cared to amuse him, and, weary of the rôle which she had at one time so gladly assumed, she shunned every possibility of meeting him.

It was now very dark ; the windows of the manor-house were lighted one after the other ; shadows came and went over the transparent curtains ; bells rang, maids rushed to and fro, and there was that general bustle which in a large house precedes the dinner hour. Mimi went toward one of the windows and looked in ; she could see the interior of the salon. Monsieur de Renoyal, all dressed for dinner, was alone and standing before the fire. His clear-cut profile stood out against the dark background of the wall, and he seemed to be examining with great attention the picture which represented the Countess and her children.

“How handsome he is !” murmured Mimi with intense sadness at her heart ; “and, good Heavens ! how I love him !”

Almost at the same moment the door opened, and Mademoiselle de Kerbséjean appeared, as fair as an angel in her dress of white muslin, with knots of blue ribbon in her fair hair. She colored when she saw that the Duke was alone, and hesitated as if she wished to avoid a *tête-à-tête*.

Monsieur Renoyal approached her with a respectful gesture, conducted her to a chair, and

then went into Madame de Kersalion's boudoir, which opened from the grand salon.

This little scene had lasted only a minute, but in that short time poor Mimi had experienced all those emotions of which a stormy nature like hers is capable ; her blood ran like molten lead through her veins, and her knees bent under her. When she saw that Monsieur de Renoyal had retired, she murmured, with inexpressible joy and triumph, "No, he does not love her !"

In a few minutes more all the family appeared in the salon, and then dinner was announced. Mimi sat down on a low garden bench, without once thinking that it was dark and that it was time to go in. The trees were covered with young leaves, and the feathery foliage cast a shadow over the avenues ; but the light of the rising moon fell full on the bench where Mimi had thrown herself. She never knew how long she had been there, when suddenly Monsieur de Kerbséjean appeared before her.

"Mimi ! my poor dear child !" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here ? I have been looking everywhere in the house for you."

She lifted her head and said moodily :

"What on earth do you want ? Have you dined already ?"

"No," he answered ; "I excused myself on the ground that our long excursion had fatigued me so much, and said I should retire. I am therefore

supposed to be in my own room. I did this because I wished to take advantage of this time to secure a few minutes' conversation with you."

Mimi half rose as if to follow him indoors.

"No," he said, "let us stay here. We shall be less liable to interruption than upstairs, and I have things to say to you which no one but yourself ought ever to hear. Ah! my dear Mimi, a month has passed in which I have seen nothing of you, but all this will be changed."

"Is any one going away?" she asked suddenly, seized by a vague anxiety.

"Yes—we two."

"You wish to go away and take me with you?" she cried with a gesture of involuntary refusal and repugnance.

He believed that she had scruples in regard to going alone with him, and he hastened to add: "You do not know, Mimi, what I would do for you. I will make you very happy, I can promise you this."

She looked at him in silent wonder. Several wild suppositions went through her mind, no one of which was anywhere near the truth. At last the thought occurred to her that he intended to adopt her, and that she, too, would be his daughter. At this thought she trembled with delight and stooped to kiss the Count's hand.

"Oh Mimi, my beautiful Mimi!" he exclaimed with a passionate movement.

Then he recoiled as suddenly to the farther end of the bench, and resumed in a calm tone : "I will not avow my intentions until the very last moment, when everything is ready for our departure. Before I can leave, however, a great event is to take place—my daughter's marriage."

"Indeed !" cried Mimi ; "and at once ?"

"Yes, at once," replied the Count, with an air of great content. "In a fortnight Irène de Kerbséjean will be called Madame la Duchesse de Renoyal !"

"Ah ! then it is he whom she marries ?" said Mimi, in a dull choked voice.

"She will remain here, happy with the husband she has chosen," continued the Count. "She will be among her family, who adore her, while I, Mimi, will go away, and shall have only you. But I have no regrets, my child. Do you understand me now ?"

She did not answer ; she did not even appear to hear him.

"Mimi," resumed the Count, taking her hand, "in a few weeks you will be my wife ; you will be the Countess de Kerbséjean."

"I—your wife !" she cried, with a laugh that was almost insulting. "No, I will never be your wife !"

The possibility of a refusal had never occurred to the Count, and he looked at Mimi with a stupefied expression.

"No," she repeated, energetically, "I will never marry you. Of course I could never marry a man of your age."

As she uttered these words she rose and rushed hurriedly away. The Count made no effort to detain her; he was overwhelmed with astonishment and confusion. It was as if he had received a slap in his face, and the shock restored him in some degree to his senses. He began to reflect and to form some sensible resolutions. He was not quite weak enough to follow Mimi and entreat her to listen to his reproaches or supplications. He went at once to his rooms and locked his doors. When Perrine went, however, according to her usual custom, to say good night to him, he allowed her to come in, and, after a few unimportant questions, asked her with a deep sigh what Mimi was doing.

"She has gone to bed without her supper," said the good woman; "that is all I know. She is absolutely unmanageable of late; her temper grows worse and worse. I really believe the girl has something on her mind—something that worries her very much."

"What is it? Can you form no idea?"

"Perhaps I can," answered Dame Perrine, with a sagacious nod of the head. "To-day she spent a couple of hours with Célestin Piolot in the conservatory—"

"Upon my life!" exclaimed the Count, with

a movement of irrepressible anger ; but he controlled himself quickly, and added as if speaking to himself : “ It is a great pity that I had not known this earlier ! ”

Mimi had, as old Perrine said, retired to her room ; but nothing was further from her intentions than to go to bed and to sleep. On the contrary, she was busily occupied with preparations for departure. She moved about as noiselessly as possible, and hung a dark shawl over the keyhole of the door which led into Perrine’s room. About two o’clock, when she was sure that every one was asleep in the house, she crept down stairs, opened the door softly, and stepped over the threshold of the Kerbséjean mansion for the last time. When she reached the shore she turned once more toward the manor-house, and muttered :

“ I would go to the end of the world rather than see their happiness ! ”

It was a soft dewy night in early spring ; the moon was just going down, and not a sound save the gentle tumult of the waves disturbed the solemn silence. Mimi walked on with a rapid step, without a thought or a glance for this peaceful picture. When she reached Célestin Piolot’s house she rapped lightly on the wooden shutter, through the cracks in which came a faint glimmer of light. The young man had not retired, and he at once opened the shutter.

"You here at this hour?" he cried, seeing Mimi wrapped in a shawl with a little bundle under her arm and her straw hat on the back of her head.

"I am going away," she said coldly; "the children of whom I spoke are undoubtedly at Saint Pol still; I am going to try and join them."

"And what will you do then?"

"Heaven only knows! probably just what I did before, when I was little."

"What utter folly!" cried Célestin. "A girl of your age can not roam through the world in this wild fashion! What will you do? How will you earn your bread?"

She opened her shawl and showed him hanging at her side the tin box which contained her papers. Her tamborine she carried under her arm.

"Yes, I am going away," she said, "and I advise you to do the same. Mademoiselle is to marry the Duke in a few days."

Célestin clung to the bars of the window like a man who suddenly feels the earth crumble under his feet, and whose brain is dizzy; then he summoned strength to gasp in a choked voice:

"Are you sure of what you say?"

"You will see," answered Mimi, "because they will be married before you, of course. You are the mayor of P——, now, are you not?"

"I shall send in my resignation at once!"

cried Célestin, "and then I shall go far away—far away from every one who ever knew me. All the ties which bound me here are broken, and I shall devote my whole future life to my country. I must find Ravachon and place myself at his disposal."

"Farewell, then!" said Mimi coldly, folding her shawl, as she spoke, over her breast, crossing it, and knotting it behind. "If you should happen to hear any inquiries made for me, say, if you please, that I have gone away where none of them can see me again, and that I shall never come back!"

It was in this extraordinary way that the daughter of the mountebank left the manor-house whose roof had been her shelter for so long. But the next day when Irène was told of her departure, she wept bitterly and refused to be comforted for some time.

Monsieur de Kerbséjean was both anxious and alarmed; he sent in every direction in search of her. He sent her clothing and money by the messengers, but they came back with both. Then the poor man went in search of Perrine, whom he found sweeping and arranging the room of the fugitive. When he expressed his anxiety, and his regret that Mimi had taken nothing away with her, the good woman consoled him.

"She has taken with her nothing that is useful, master, that is certain." And she opened the

well-filled drawers in the bureau. "She has left all these, and taken only the bunch of feathers torn from the fan you gave her, and the beautiful pink dress embroidered with silver. Ah ! master, it was no use to try to do anything with her ; she is indeed a thorough Bohemian."

THE END.

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